

A Companion to Marie de France

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A Companion to Marie de France

Edited by
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INTRODUCTION

In his *Recueil de la langue et poesie françoise* in 1581 Claude Fauchet catalogues 127 French authors living before the year 1300. Item 84 of Book II, “Marie de France,” records the following entry:

*Marie de France, ne porte ce surnom pour ce qu'elle fust du sang des Rois:
mais pource qu'elle estoit natifve de France, car elle dit,*

*Au finement de cet escrit,
Me nommerai par remembrance,
Marie ai nom, si sui de France.*

*Elle a mis en vers François les fables d'Esopo moralisees, qu'elle dit avoir
translatees d'Anglois en François. Pour l'amour au Conte Guillaume,*

*Le plus vaillant de ce Roiaume.*¹

[Marie de France does not carry this surname because she is of royal blood, but because she is a native of France, for she states,

At the end of this work,
I will name myself for posterity,
My name is Marie, I am from France.

She put into French verse the moralized fables of Aesop, which she claims to have translated from English into French. For love of Count William,

The most valiant of this realm. (my translation)]

Fauchet was the first “literary critic” to assign this title to Marie de France, and today we still refer to her by that name. However, after nearly five full centuries and much research and writing on Marie, this simple reference remains the only biographical information we know for certain about this poet. Yet Marie de France embodies one of the most prominent literary voices of the 12th century and was, to the best of our knowledge, the first woman of letters to write in French. In addition to the collection of Aesopic fables mentioned by Fauchet, she is most likely the author whose name appears simply as “Marie” in three other works: the *Lais*, *L'Espurgatoire seint Patriz*, and *La Vie seinte Audree*, all of which will be discussed in this book. The fact that these

¹ Glyn S. Burgess, *Marie de France: An Analytical Bibliography* (London, 1977), p. 47.

works bear authorial reference is significant in and of itself during a time in which many authors of literary texts remain anonymous.

The lack of firm biographical details has not prevented critics from speculating over the years, to varying degrees of accomplishment, about the identity and literary career of Marie de France. However, scholarship has generally agreed that she wrote for the Anglo-Angevin court of Henry II sometime during the last third of the 12th century. A poet by the name of Marie captured the attention of Denis Piramus around 1180, and he mentions her at the beginning of his *Vie seint Edmund le rei*:

E dame Marie autresi,
 Ki en rime fist e basti
 E compassa les vers de lais,
 Ke ne sunt pas del tut verais;
 E si en est ele mult loée
 E la rime par tut amée,
 Kar mult l'aiment, si l'unt mult cher
 Cunte, barun e chivaler... (vv. 35–42)

[And likewise lady Marie, who put into rhyme, constructed, and arranged verses of *lais*, which are not true at all (not completely true?); and she is much praised for it and her rhymes appreciated everywhere, for many people like them, and counts, barons, and knights appreciate them.]²

Could Piramus be referring to the same Marie to whom we now confidently attribute the *Lais*? Most critics believe this to be the case. The texts that he mentions appear to have been circulating in the same English courtly circles with which Piramus himself was associated.

There have been numerous attempts to identify Marie de France as having been associated with religious orders and with royal houses. These associations would explain her familiarity with courtly life and the source of her education, possibly in a convent (she knew Latin well and most likely English). Various efforts have recognized her as abbess of Shaftesbury in Dorset (half-sister to Henry II), abbess of Reading, Marie de Meulan, and Marie de Bourgogne.³ Despite these scholarly

² See in this book the chapter by Keith Busby, "The Manuscripts of Marie de France," where he cites Hilding Kjellman, ed., *La vie seint Edmund le rei, poème anglo-normand du XII^e siècle* (Göteborg, 1935). Busby's translation.

³ For a detailed discussion of these possible identities, see Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, trans., *The Lais of Marie de France*, 2nd ed. (1986; London, 1999), pp. 17–19.

endeavors, there seems to be no convincing evidence to establish firmly her identity, and her life remains a mystery.

One of the defining moments in the growth of Marie de France studies came in 1977 when Glyn S. Burgess published his *Marie de France: An Analytical Bibliography*. The influence of Burgess's work cannot be overemphasized. Even with the advent and rapid development of the Internet, and the ease with which it now allows online searches in databases such as the MLA and WorldCat, there can be no substitute for the careful annotations for each bibliographical entry. In fact, Burgess's bibliography is in large part responsible for the sudden increase in publications on Marie de France from 1980 onwards by greatly facilitating research on the subject. For example, in his first annotated bibliography, he records 77 editions, translations, anthologies, and adaptations of Marie's works, as well as 425 books and articles and 26 dissertations and theses written in whole or in part on the author from a period that spans the end of the 16th century (Fauchet) until the late 1970s (he also lists the medieval manuscripts that contain her works). Since the appearance of the original bibliography, Burgess has published three Supplements (1986, 1997, and 2007) in which he lists a total of 11 bibliographies, one concordance, one journal (*Le Cygne*), 110 editions and translations, 902 books and articles, and 44 dissertations and theses. These numbers are impressive in representing a mere 30 years of scholarship as opposed to the nearly 400 years of critical work recorded in the original bibliography of 1977. Readers who may be interested in further studies on Marie de France are encouraged to begin their research with these valuable bibliographies.

The chapters in this book are composed by scholars who have specialized in Marie de France studies, in most cases for many years. They have each chosen an area of expertise in which they offer traditional critical views alongside new approaches to their respective subjects. Their contributions are rich in bibliographical references to the most relevant research on their topics, including many items that have appeared since Burgess's last Supplement (2007). Some of the most recent research on Marie de France has focused on her possible authorship of a late 12th-century hagiographical work, *La Vie seinte Audree*, a text whose author identifies herself simply as "Marie" in the penultimate verse of the epilogue. The need for further research on the possibility that Marie de France composed the *Audree* was suggested at least as early

as 1968 by Richard Baum and again in 1974 by Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr.⁴ In 2002 June Hall McCash answered this call with a convincing article in *Speculum*.⁵ Several of the chapters here address this issue to some extent, especially those by McCash and Rupert T. Pickens. Recent conversations at conferences suggest that not all scholars are prepared to attribute the *Audree* to Marie de France's corpus, but a growing number embrace the idea, particularly as new research emerges. It is nonetheless a bit premature to use the word *debate* in reference to Marie de France's authorship of the *Audree*, since no one, to the best of my knowledge, has yet responded to the evidence proposed by McCash in 2002 by publishing reasons to believe that Marie was not the author of the work in question. In all fairness, though, one must recognize that we are fairly early in the discussion of the attribution of this work to Marie de France, and there will surely be those who publish contrary views in the future.

All of the works traditionally attributed to Marie de France open with formal prologues: the *Lais*, the *Fables* (or *Isopet*), *L'Espurgatoire saint Patriz*, and most recently *La Vie seinte Audree*. While the *Fables*, the *Audree*, and the *Espurgatoire* also close with proper epilogues, Marie's first work, the *Lais*, does not. In the first chapter I discuss these prologues and epilogues, as well as some of the opening and closing remarks to individual *lais*, to demonstrate how they frame the work and serve rhetorical functions such as *captatio benevolentiae*, *auctoritas*, and *causa scribendi*. Her prologues and epilogues often reflect themes found in the texts that they open and close, such as the theme of adventure that structures the *Lais* and the faculty of memory to which she often appeals in all her works. Marie's comments at the beginning and end of her works reveal that she recognized the power of rhetoric within the creative process of medieval literary *inventio* as she strove to assure the survival of her stories and her name for future generations.

Marie de France's *lais* are embedded in old traditions whether they come through Breton storytellers, as she often says, or whether they are stories that come from Greco-Roman antiquity, a tradition with which she is clearly conversant from her reference to Priscian in the

⁴ Richard Baum, *Recherches sur les œuvres attribuées à Marie de France* (Heidelberg, 1968), p. 196; and Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., *Marie de France* (New York, 1974), pp. 143–44.

⁵ "La vie seinte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?" *Speculum* 77.3 (2002), 744–77.

General Prologue. She acknowledges the great tradition that the ancients deliberately wrote obscurely and demonstrates a closeness to Ovid. In Chapter 2 Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., brings Marie's use of the ancient classical tradition up to date in the light of past and current scholarship. He also explores how in her General Prologue Marie follows the great ethical tradition of the ancients and the learning that comes from Martianus Capella, one of the favorite texts in the 12th-century schools. In this prologue she tells us how to read these many stories reshaped and clothed in the storytelling of the Bretons, but often from the ancient tradition of the Greeks and Romans.

From diverse perspectives, each of Marie de France's tales in her collection of *Lais* presents love as a central, ineluctable, and problematic force in the lives of medieval noble men and women. Beginning with Marie's complex presentation of love in *Guigemar*, Roberta L. Krueger examines in Chapter 3 the literary contexts and poetic manifestations of love in Marie's *Lais*. Although no single doctrine of *amors* predominates, the collection weaves together recurring themes and motifs as Marie's female narrator alternately scrutinizes, praises, condemns, laments, and celebrates love and its practitioners. Topics analyzed include Ovidian love, drawn from the *Remedia amoris* and the *Metamorphoses*; the discourse of *fin' amors*; the *Lais*'s complex treatment of courtship, marriage, and adultery; Marie's valorization of suffering, reciprocity, and *mesure*; love and its relation to the "merveilleux"; sexuality and the body; the *Lais*'s recasting of the Tristan legend; Marie's evocation of the bonds of filial and religious devotion; and, finally, desire and writing.

In Chapter 4 Judith Rice Rothschild discusses an ongoing renaissance in Marie de France studies, with particular attention being given to the collection of the 12 narrative poems known as the *Lais*. All 12 of these texts are found together in only one extant manuscript, the famous London, British Library, Harley 978.⁶ Considering a variety of literary and socio-cultural topics in relation to the author and her tales, Rothschild includes an overview of the history of Marie's *Lais* and her identity; a presentation of many elements composing the complexity of the tales (e.g. the criss-crossing of multiple themes, principal and ancillary, and motifs across the 12 stories); a review of the principal

⁶ London, British Library, Harley 978 has the General Prologue, then all the *lais*, in the following order: *Guigemar*, *Equitan*, *Le Fresne*, *Bisclavret*, *Lanval*, *Deus Amanz*, *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, *Milun*, *Chaitivel*, *Chevrefoil*, and *Eliduc*.

character types in love triangles in their repetition and variations; and a selective presentation of approaches, perspectives, and methods of 20th- and 21st-century scholars of the *Lais*.

The 12 *lais* in MS Harley 978 constitute, in spite of their disparate length, a coherent body of material and are normally attributed to a single author: Marie de France. The remaining 24 or so narratives which are generally classified as *lais* are less coherent as a group; a few have named authors, but most are anonymous. However, the 11 *lais* published in 1976 by Prudence Mary O'Hara Tobin (*Les Lais anonymes des XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, Geneva) and by Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook in 2007 (*Eleven Old French Narrative Lays*, Cambridge) have sufficient links among them to be considered a corpus of material. Over the years, studies of the relationship between the anonymous *lais* and the *lais* of Marie de France have been conducted, but their principal aim has been to see whether Marie could have been the author of a particular *lai* or whether the anonymous *lais* were influenced by Marie's *lais*, textually or thematically. Marie's *lais* have invariably been considered as superior works of art. In Chapter 5 Glyn S. Burgess looks at the two series of narratives, without prejudice to the respective quality of the compositions, and compares and contrasts them from the point of view of characters, themes (chivalry, love, the *merveilleux*), structure, and literary techniques (such as description).

Marie de France often uses animals to make us ask questions about when they are or are not themselves, how they figure multiple relations linking the human to the sub-human or the supernatural, and what those assorted foxes, weasels, werewolves, and birds might represent. Through selected examples, Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner compares and contrasts in Chapter 6 the role of animals in the *Lais* and the *Fables* in order to explore how Marie links her animal figures to diverse literary traditions (e.g. Aesopic fables, bestiaries, beast epic, the *merveilleux breton* of oral tales, and romance), while freely manipulating them to produce her own *translatio*.

In Chapter 7 Charles Brucker shows how Marie's fable is very deeply rooted in the history of the so-called bestiary, which was already linked with the Aesopic fable in Antiquity. He gives special attention to the *Physiologus* and the bestiary of Philippe de Thaon. Through examining several versions of the *Romulus*, he reveals how Aesopic fables took rise and developed from Antiquity to the 12th century. In Chapter 8 Brucker develops the notion that Marie's poetic imagination serves a minor literary genre that supports her collection of fables, i.e. the mirror

for princes; the mirror for princes is exceptionally exemplified by the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury, an Englishman, who, like Marie de France, lived in the entourage of King Henry II. He explores Marie's originality in the ways she individualizes, concretizes, and dramatizes the conventional matter of fables.

June Hall McCash examines in Chapter 9 the two religious works, *L'Espurgatoire saint Patriz*, long accepted to be one of Marie de France's poems, and *La Vie seinte Audree*, written, as she has previously suggested (*Speculum*, 2002), by the same author. Despite remarkable similarities of style, vocabulary, and phraseology in the two texts, McCash explains that the ways in which the protagonists relate to Christological implications, demands, and choices underscores the gender differences between the two main characters in question and leads to the creation of significantly divergent literary creations.

Like the *Lais*, *Fables*, and *Espurgatoire saint Patriz* traditionally ascribed to Marie de France, *La Vie seinte Audree* was written during the last decades of the 12th century by a woman from the Ile-de-France named Marie, residing in England. In Chapter 10 Rupert T. Pickens identifies the text Marie translates as one close to that of British Library, Cotton Domitian A XV (B) (compiled 1184–89), copies of which are the basis of Daniel Papelbroch's *De S. Etheldreda Regina* in the *Acta sanctorum*, as Östen Södergård recognized, not the *Liber Eliensis*, as scholars generally claim. Focusing on the *Miracula*, the chapter explores the nature of the B collection and Marie's method in translating it. As in the *Espurgatoire* and *Fables*, both translations from known Latin exemplars, Marie appropriates the miracles as her own and creates a unique narrative voice, which supplants those of a multiplicity of contributors to the Latin collection.

In the final chapter, Keith Busby examines the manuscript corpus of Marie de France's *œuvre* and shows how close examination of the codicological context can enhance our understanding of the individual narratives as well as the collective structures of the Harley *Lais* and the *Ysopet* (*Fables*). Marie's presence may inform the *Lais* in manuscripts where the poems are attributed to her, but the history of their transmission is one of increasing anonymity and absorption into a wider interest. The *Ysopet*, in contrast, is persistently associated with her, while the contexts of the *Espurgatoire* and the *Vie seinte Audree* are quite particular.

These chapters bear witness that Marie de France studies thrive today more than ever in the history of literary criticism and continue to evolve

through new critical perspectives. The growing interest in the works of France's first woman of letters is confirmed by the substantial body of criticism recorded in Burgess's annotated bibliographies. This progress is also verified by the founding in 1992 of the International Marie de France Society that still holds annual business meetings and regularly sponsors one to three sessions in appropriate international venues like the annual International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and the Triennial International Courtly Literature Society. Furthermore, *Le Cygne: Bulletin of the International Marie de France Society: Abstracts, Notes, and Queries*, a yearly journal first published in 1995, contains articles and abstracts of conference papers on Marie de France. A new series was established in 2002 under the title, *Le Cygne: Journal of the International Marie de France Society* and is listed in the MLA Bibliography. We are pleased to participate in the ongoing development of scholarship on Marie de France and hope the chapters in this book will serve scholars, students, and general readers who are interested in one of France's greatest literary voices.

Logan E. Whalen

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROLOGUES AND THE EPILOGUES OF MARIE DE FRANCE

Logan E. Whalen

All of the works traditionally attributed to the late 12th-century author that modern scholarship knows as Marie de France open with formal prologues: the *Lais*, the *Fables* (or *Isopet*), and *L'Espurgatoire seint Patriz*.¹ While the *Fables* and the *Espurgatoire* also close with proper epilogues, Marie's first work, the *Lais*, does not. In recent years there has been growing critical attention given to the late 12th-century saint's life, *La Vie seinte Audree*, composed by an author who simply refers to herself as "Marie," the same authorial reference employed in the *Lais* and the *Espurgatoire*; it is only in the epilogue to the *Fables* that the author names herself as Marie "de France." Some scholars now accept the notion, based on "lexical, linguistic, stylistic, and intertextual data," that the same Marie who wrote the *Espurgatoire* composed the *Audree* as well.² I, too, have considered this possibility elsewhere,³ but it is not my intention here to engage fully the debate

¹ The commonly held, yet approximate, dating of these works puts them in the following order of composition: *Lais* (1160–70), *Fables* (1167–89), and *Espurgatoire* (after 1189 and before 1215). Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Marie de France," in *Medieval France: An Encyclopedia*, ed. William W. Kibler and Grover A. Zinn (New York and London, 1995), p. 589.

² See in this book the introduction to June Hall McCash's chapter, "Gendered Sanctity in Marie de France's *L'Espurgatoire seint Patriz* and *La Vie seinte Audree*." McCash places the date of the composition of the *Audree* at the end of the 12th century. See also her "La vie seinte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?" *Speculum* 77.3 (2002), 744–77; and June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban, ed. and trans., *The Life of Saint Audrey* (Jefferson, NC, and London, 2006), pp. 5–8. For a detailed study on the *Audree* and its sources, see the chapter by Rupert T. Pickens in this book, "Marie de France *Translatrix* II: *La Vie seinte Audree*." The need for further research on the possibility that Marie de France composed the *Audree* was suggested at least as early as Richard Baum, *Recherches sur les œuvres attribuées à Marie de France* (Heidelberg, 1968), p. 196; and Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., *Marie de France* (New York, 1974), pp. 143–44.

³ *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (Washington, DC, 2008), pp. 137–73.

surrounding the corpus of Marie de France and which texts she may have authored, or not. However, in light of the emerging discussion on this topic within Marie de France studies, I will examine in this chapter the prologue and epilogue of the *Audree* alongside those of the *Lais*, *Fables*, and *Espurgatoire*.

The relationship of exordia to the text they precede, and of epilogues to the matter they close, is an important one. They frame the work and serve rhetorical functions such as *captatio benevolentiae* (capturing the attention and goodwill of the audience), *auctoritas* (citing authority, thus credibility, for the matter at hand), and *causa scribendi* (the author's justification or reason for writing). Furthermore, prologues and epilogues often reflect themes from the text proper and, in the case of the former, often stand to alert the audience to the type of story about to be told, whether a bellicose tale of heroic deeds as in the *chansons de geste*, a scurrilous anecdote from a fabliau, or an account of adventure and courtly love in a romance or *lai*. Marie de France's carefully constructed prologues and epilogues situate her in the classical learned tradition as they demonstrate her understanding of grammar and rhetoric, two divisions of the Liberal Arts that medieval authors learned through studying past authorities such as Cicero and Priscian.⁴ Moreover, her opening and closing comments consistently reveal a concern with memory, one of the most prevalent themes in all her works.⁵

I. *The General Prologue*

The *Lais* are a collection of 12 short narrative tales in a courtly setting that sometimes involves the *merveilleux*. They treat a range of socio-cultural aspects that can differ from one story to the next,⁶ but the theme of love represents a common element in all the texts. The *lais*

⁴ For more on this subject see the chapter in this book by Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., "Marie de France and the Learned Tradition." See also my *Poetics of Memory*, pp. 9–33.

⁵ Parts of my discussion to follow on rhetoric and the theme of memory in Marie de France's prologues and epilogues are taken from *Poetics of Memory*, pp. 35–60, and used here with permission of the Catholic University of America Press.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the socio-cultural and socio-political aspects of the *Lais*, see in this book the chapter by Judith Rice Rothschild, "Literary and Socio-Cultural Aspects of the *Lais* of Marie de France."

range in length from 118 verses (*Chevrefoil*) to 1,184 verses (*Eliduc*).⁷ Each *lai* has its own short prologue and epilogue, or closing authorial remarks.

The larger 56-line prologue that precedes Marie de France's *Lais* in the London, British Library, Harley 978 manuscript is often referred to in contemporary critical discourse as the "General Prologue," a reference that distinguishes it from the exordia of individual *lais*, especially the prologue of *Guigemar* that immediately follows it in this same manuscript. Harley 978 is unique in that it is the only manuscript of the *Lais* to record the General Prologue.⁸ The *Lais* are not followed by a formal epilogue in any of the manuscripts, and there is no evidence that an epilogue ever existed.

Jean Rychner has suggested that, in lieu of the General Prologue, the first 18 lines of the *lai* of *Guigemar* were originally intended as the prologue to the *Lais*: "Il est possible que nous ayons dans les vv. 1–18 [de *Guigemar*] un petit prologue plus ou moins indépendant que Marie avait peut-être placé dès l'abord en tête de son ouvrage et qu'elle ne supprima pas lorsqu'elle composa son prologue-dédicace [des *Lais*]; c'est que notamment elle y avait signé son œuvre."⁹ Rupert T. Pickens elaborates on Rychner's distinction between the prologue to *Guigemar* and the General Prologue to the *Lais*, proposing that we view the former as the first, and the latter as the second. I share his opinion in seeing the General Prologue as representing a synopsis of her literary motivations more than displaying the beginnings of her literary career, "le résultat de sa plus grande maturité créatrice."¹⁰

Whether or not Marie wrote the General Prologue before, during, or after the composition of the *lais* may still be open to debate, but its

⁷ All references to the *Lais* are from Alfred Ewert, ed., *Marie de France: Lais* (Oxford, 1944; repr. with introduction and bibliography by Glyn S. Burgess, London, 1995). Translations are from Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, trans., *The Lais of Marie de France*, 2nd ed. (1986; London, 1999).

⁸ In addition to Harley 978, five other manuscripts contain one or more *lais*: British Library, Cotton Vespasian B. XIV (*Lanval*); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, nouv. acq. fr. 1104, (*Guigemar*, *Lanval*, *Yonec*, *Chevrefoil*, *Deus Amanz* [fragmentary], *Bisclavret* [fragmentary], *Milun*, *Le Fresne*, and *Equitan*); BnF, fr. 2168 (*Yonec* [fragmentary], *Guigemar*, and *Lanval*); and BnF, fr. 24432 (*Yonec*). For further study on the manuscripts that contain Marie de France's works, see the chapter by Keith Busby in this book, "The Manuscripts of Marie de France."

⁹ *Les Lais de Marie de France*, (Classiques Français du Moyen Âge) 93 (Paris, 1983), p. 239.

¹⁰ Rupert T. Pickens, "La Poétique de Marie de France d'après les prologues des *Lais*," *Les Lettres Romanes* 32 (1978), 367–84, here 368.

relevance to her literary plan as a whole is clear.¹¹ While her narrative art in all the texts of the collection demonstrates in one way or another her competence in the art of rhetoric, the 56 octosyllabic rhymed couplets of this exordium are of special significance, particularly the first 27 verses. They spell out the poet's *causa scribendi* and function as a microcosm and brief apology of the process of *inventio* (medieval literary invention), not only for the *Lais* they precede but for all her authorial endeavors that will follow. The exordial matter in these lines has received a great deal of scholarly attention as a type of authorial manifesto in which she expounds her views on the poet's role in the process of literary composition.

The opening lines of the General Prologue extol the virtues of literary composition, and they function as a *captatio benevolentiae* that justifies Marie's decision to write.

Ki Deus ad duné esciēce
E de parler bon' eloquence
Ne s'en deit taisir ne celer,
Ainz se deit volunteers mustrer. (vv. 1–4)

[Anyone who has received from God the gift of knowledge and true eloquence has a duty not to remain silent: rather should one be happy to reveal such talents.]

This opening passage no doubt is meant to remind the audience of the *Parable of the Talents* from Matthew 25:14–30.¹² Marie's attempt in these lines to acquire the goodwill of her audience by showing that it is an author's duty to exercise the talent that has been bestowed

¹¹ See Richard Baum, *Recherches*, pp. 32–41. He argues, and I think unconvincingly, that all the *lais* in the collection cannot be attributed with certainty to Marie de France. He cites several reasons for his position, including the repetition of material in the prologue of *Guigemar* that is found in the General Prologue immediately preceding it, the lack of a formal epilogue to the *Lais* like the ones found in the *Fables* and the *Espurgatoire*, and his belief that not all of the texts in the collection conform to our understanding of the *lai* as a genre. I believe that most of the evidence that has been offered in critical analysis over the years, both cultural and linguistic, suggests otherwise.

¹² For studies on Marie's allusion to the *Parable of the Talents*, see the following: Brewster Fitz, "The Prologue to the *Lais* of Marie de France and the *Parable of the Talents*: Gloss and Monetary Metaphor," *Modern Language Notes* 90 (1995), 558–64; Andrew Cowell, "Deadly Letters: 'Deus Amans,' Marie's 'Prologue' to the *Lais*, and the Dangerous Nature of the Gloss," *Romanic Review* 88.3 (1997), 337–56; and Herman Braet, "Marie de France et l'obscurité des anciens," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 79 (1978), 180–84. Braet proposes that Marie's invocation of this parable is intended to invite future readers to gloss her text.

upon her or him—"Ne s'en deit taisir ne celer, / Ainz se deit volunteers mustrer" [a duty not to remain silent: rather should one be happy to reveal such talents]—is significant as a rhetorical device. Indeed, when one considers that she counts herself among the elite group of authors who possess "escience," and to whom are given the "bone eloquence" of speaking, it becomes apparent that her assertion is audacious and courageous, coming from a woman who was writing in the exclusively male literary milieu of her period.

Marie's entry into the literary domain of her time emphasizes the role and responsibility of the author in the transmission of knowledge. She chooses to begin her text with the object pronoun "Ki" that assumes a privileged syntactical position as the first word of the first line of the General Prologue. In this way, the author takes center stage at the very beginning of her literary works, in her prefatory remarks, as she establishes the importance of continuing the tradition of *translatio studii*, the transfer of knowledge from one generation or culture to the next.

The opening lines of this prologue reflect a partial paradigm of the art of medieval *inventio* and the poetics of literary rhetoric. The noun "escience" means knowledge or intelligence, and by extension evokes the craft of memory, since memory is the storehouse of all knowledge.¹³ Memory is an important step in the process of *inventio* and is a recurrent theme in all the prologues and epilogues of the works of Marie de France.¹⁴ Marie's observation that this "escience" is God-given recalls the natural and artificial memory division held by the author of the *ad Herennium*: "Sunt igitur duae memoriae: una naturalis, altera artificiosa. Naturalis est ea quae nostris animis insita est et simul cum cogitatione nata; artificiosa est ea quam confirmat inductio quaedam et ratio praeceptionis" [There are, then, two kinds of memory: one natural, and the other the product of art. The natural memory is that

¹³ See Adolf Tobler and Erhard Lommatzsch, eds., *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* (Stuttgart, 1925–2002), s.v. "escience."

¹⁴ See James Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1974). He notes that the treatment of *inventio* in the *ad Herennium* is similar to Cicero's and may explain the medieval belief that he was its author. It is likely that an educated person like Marie de France knew the *ad Herennium* and Cicero's *De inventione*, since Murphy notes that they appear in library catalogues during the 12th century, the former 13 times and the latter 32 times (pp. 19 and 109). For a study on *inventio*, or medieval topical invention, see Douglas Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance* (Madison, WI, 1992).

memory which is embedded in our minds, born simultaneously with thought. The artificial memory is that memory which is strengthened by a kind of training and system of discipline] (3.16.28).¹⁵ Whether an innate gift, for the writer of pagan antiquity, or a God-given talent, for the writer of Christianized medieval Europe, it is likely that “escience,” in the General Prologue, encompasses both the memory that is part of our natural cognition and the memory that is trained through study and discipline.

Likewise, the verb *parler* in “de parler bone eloquence” of the second line signifies more than a speech act. As the prologue continues to show, this expression is also designed to suggest the process of literary *inventio* in general and to include the act of writing as well. One must keep in mind that within the study of grammar the distinction between preparation for oral discourse and preparation for written discourse (*recte loquendi*) did not exist in the Middle Ages.¹⁶ More specifically, it is the ability of an author to arrange the matter at hand and present it to an audience in such a manner that allows the work to take on new life. In Marie’s case, specifically throughout all her narrative texts that will follow the General Prologue, “de parler bone eloquence” showcases among other literary talents a special concern for narrative description.

In addition to Marie de France’s concern with memory, the beginning of the General Prologue echoes another theme that permeates the *lais*, that of fecundity:

Quant uns granz biens est mult oïz,
Dunc a primes est il fluriz,
E quant loëz est de plusurs,
Dunc ad espandues ses flurs. (vv. 5–8)

[When a truly beneficial thing is heard by many people, it then enjoys its first blossom, but if it is widely praised its flowers are in full bloom.]

Her choice of a floral metaphor is certainly not fortuitous. The words *fluriz* and *flurs* recall the *début printanier* [springtime beginning] that was quite common in medieval French romance and lyric. The season of spring brings life and, with it, hope as reflected in the full blossoms

¹⁵ All references to the text of the *ad Herennium* and English translations are from *Ad C. Herennium de ratione dicendi*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA, 1954).

¹⁶ See Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp. 24–25.

of the flowers. Marie's *lais* in one way or another juxtapose life and death, fecundity and sterility, and always in a context where love is the central concern. One example of this narrative technique can be found in the castle episode of *Guigemar*, the first *lai* of the collection. The eponymous hero, who in the text had previously shown no interest in love, is healed of his wound in the thigh, a euphemism for impotence and a clear mark of sterility, by the physical and emotional love of a lady, a fecund image that stands in opposition to Guigemar's unfavorable condition. Furthermore, the room in which this healing takes place, and in which the lady has been imprisoned by her old jealous husband, is guarded by a castrated priest, the ultimate symbol of sterility. By associating the act of composing poetry with the multiplying of flowers, Marie highlights the process of *inventio*. In fact, the etymology of *florilegium* (from Latin *flori*, flowers + *legere*, to gather), a word that describes a volume of collected writings in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, reflects the idea of gathering a variety of material into a single, specific *locus*, in this case a book with leaves (*folii*).

In the next 13 lines of the General Prologue, Marie continues to justify, and lend credibility to, her own literary undertakings by enlisting the common rhetorical *topos* of *auctoritas*:

Custume fu as ancïens,
 Ceo tes[ti]moine Precïens,
 Es livres ke jadis feseient
 Assez oscurement diseient
 Pur ceus ki a venir esteient
 E ki aprendre les deveient,
 K'i peüssent gloser la lettre
 E de lur sen le surplus mettre.
 Li philosophe le saveient
 E par eus memes entendeient,
 Cum plus trespasserunt le tens,
 Plus serreient sutil de sens
 E plus se savreient garder
 De ceo k'i ert, a trespasser. (vv. 9–22)

[It was customary for the ancients, in the books which they wrote [Priscian testifies to this], to express themselves very obscurely so that those in later generations, who had to learn them, could provide a gloss for the text and put the finishing touches to their meaning. Men of learning were aware of this and their experience had taught them that the more time they spent studying texts the more subtle would be their understanding of them and they would be better able to avoid future mistakes.]

Among all the other implications of these lines, including the justification for taking pre-existing material and adapting it to the concerns at hand, the fact that she mentions Priscian by name is of particular significance, for nowhere else in the works that have been attributed to her does she specifically name a grammarian or rhetorician, either in her texts or in the prologues and epilogues. This historical reference is different from her mention of the Bretons in the *Lais*, or the book of King Alfred in the epilogue to the *Fables*, both alleged sources of material for her stories. Instead, this is an explicit revelation of at least one of the authorities from whom she learned to write, as is evidenced by her understanding of the grammarian's "testimony," or rather what he himself had to say about the art of literary composition. Her belief that Priscian "testifies" to the veracity of her comments on textual transmission shows her familiarity with the views of at least one of the authors of the arts of rhetoric and grammar who represented part of her curriculum in literary training.

Perhaps no other lines from Marie de France have fostered more critical exchange than lines 9–22, and while the scope of this chapter does not allow for an intricate account of all opinions expressed on this passage over the years, a basic understanding of certain divergent critical perspectives will nonetheless be beneficial in establishing the importance of this authorial reference.

The principal debate over Marie's meaning in these lines has centered on her reference to Priscian and the authorial intention of earlier authors. Scholars have traditionally associated lines 9–12 from Marie's text with Priscian's opening paragraph of the *Institutiones grammaticae*, one of the most influential treatises on grammar and widely used for instruction during the Middle Ages.¹⁷ This assumption appears to be based on general acceptance, since the end of the 19th century, of Karl Warnke's association of Marie's comments with Priscian's *Institutiones*, which is, as far as I know, the earliest suggestion of such a relationship.¹⁸

¹⁷ See Appendix A in my *Poetics of Memory*. See also the article by Tony Hunt, "Glossing Marie de France," *Romanische Forschungen* 86 (1974), 396–418. He notes that more than "500 manuscripts of the *Institutiones* survive, of which 347 are dated to before the end of the twelfth century" (p. 403).

¹⁸ Karl Warnke, ed., *Die Lais der Marie de France*, 3rd ed. (1885; Halle, 1925), pp. 259–60, p. 225 in the first edition of 1885.

Most attention given to this passage has focused on the meaning of lines in which Marie comments on the intention of the Ancients:

Assez oscurement diseient
 Pur ceus ki a venir esteient
 E ki aprendre les deveient,
 K'i peüssent gloser la lettre
 E de lur sen le surplus mettre. (vv. 12–16)

[To express themselves very obscurely so that those in later generations, who had to learn them, could provide a gloss for the text and put the finishing touches to their meaning.]

The question arises whether or not she had in mind a commentary more from the perspective of the Ancients or from that of the Moderns.¹⁹ In other words, did those authors who preceded her expressly leave their texts obscure so that contemporary authors like herself could extract their hidden meanings and elucidate them through their own interpretation? Or did she mean to say that the Ancients naturally wrote obscurely because they did not possess the knowledge that later authors would acquire owing to the passing of time? Does she therefore expect the future readers of her text to make their own glosses?

Though these questions may never be answered with consensus, they have nonetheless generated much textual analysis of Marie's General Prologue and several hypotheses of Marie's motivation in citing Priscian. One problem in this realm has been that Marie's mention of the obscurity of the Ancients cannot be supported directly by Priscian's comments in the opening sentences of his *Institutiones*, since his concern there is with older grammarians, while Marie refers to preceding authors of literary texts. In assessing the critical dialogue that has developed over this reference, Mary-Louise Zanoni summarizes the different approaches in this way: "the definition of Marie's poetic principles by internal analysis of the prologue itself; the comparison of Marie's literary craft to the methods of scriptural exegesis and the concomitant assertion that the *Lais* have a hidden Christian significance; and the examination of how Marie's contemporaries understood Priscian's statements on the relationships of ancient authors and

¹⁹ See my article, "Marie de France and the Ancients," in *"De sens rassis": Essays in Honor of Rupert T. Pickens*, ed. Keith Busby, Bernard Guidot, and Logan E. Whalen (Amsterdam and New York, 2005), pp. 719–28.

later interpreters.”²⁰ Among the many studies to which Zanoni alludes, of those that have attempted to outline Marie’s poetics through an internal analysis of the General Prologue, Pickens offers a detailed and original reading, identifying five sections and showing how each one relates to Marie’s corpus in general. His analysis of the relationships linking these sections reconciles a “poetics of writing” with a “poetics of *mouvance*.” Each *lai* individually and all the *lais* collectively are products of a process of *mouvance*. Marie’s writing hers down is a moment in the history of this process; and, in their continued reception, Marie’s *lais* are themselves subject to the process.²¹ Memory plays a significant role in this paradigm as he notes in reference to his section 1 by signaling its use in the General Prologue, *Eliduc*, and *Chaitivel*: “Tout se passe selon l’intention créatrice du poète, qui fait un poème *pur remembrance* (cf. Pr 35), *pur remembrer* quelque chose (cf. *El* 1183, *Cht* 2 et 111)—c’est-à-dire, simultanément l’œuvre rappelle à l’auditeur ce qu’elle commémore et se soumet à ses activités mnémoniques et interprétatives, et l’auditeur à la fois souffre une stimulation intellectuelle et se met à scruter le poème.”²²

As for a hidden Christian significance in the *Lais*, Leo Spitzer was the first to suggest that Marie’s reference to Priscian was designed to support an approach of biblical exegesis to her text, and his view was soon afterwards championed by D.W. Robertson.²³ Approximately ten

²⁰ Mary-Louise Zanoni, “‘Ceo Testimoine Preciens’: Priscian and the Prologue to the *Lais* of Marie de France,” *Traditio* 36 (1980), 407–15, here 408.

²¹ Pickens, “Poétique,” pp. 367–70. His five sections are: (1) 1–8 (“Lieux communs d’exorde” [florescence]); (2) 9–22 (reference to Priscian); (3) 23–32 (“lieux communs d’exorde” [*causa scribendi* and the process of writing]); (4) 33–42 (history of Marie’s *lais*); and (5) 43–56 (dedication). He works from a Zumthorian model of *mouvance*, or the mobility of a text during its transmission; cf. Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris, 1972). Other informative studies include Sally L. Burch, “The Prologue to Marie’s *Lais*: Back to the *Littera*,” *AUMLA: Journal of the Australian Universities Language and Literature Association* 89 (1998), 15–42; Maurice Delbouille, “El chief de cest commencement,” in *Études de civilisation médiévales IX^e–XII^e siècles: mélanges offerts à Edmond-René Labande* (Poitiers, 1974), pp. 185–96; Jean-Claude Delclos, “Encore le prologue des *Lais* de Marie de France,” *Le Moyen Âge* 90.2 (1984), 223–32; and Alfred Foulet and Karl D. Uitti, “The Prologue to the *Lais* of Marie de France: A Reconsideration,” *Romance Philology* 35 (1981–82), 242–49. Delclos argues for coherence in the General Prologue and sees the opening lines as reconciling Marie’s literary task with that of her predecessors. Foulet and Uitti examine the *topoi* of *auctoritas* and *translatio studii* and offer detailed commentary on line 16, “E de lur sen le surplus mettre,” and lines 21–22, “E plus se saveient garder / De ceo k’i ert, a trespasser.”

²² Pickens, “Poétique,” pp. 374–75.

²³ Leo Spitzer, “The Prologue to the *Lais* of Marie de France and Medieval Poetics,” *Modern Philology* 41 (1943–44), 96–102; repr. in *Romanische Literaturstudien*

years later, Mortimer Donovan steered attention away from the religious reading of this passage, embracing the belief that the Ancients may have been obscure, but not intentionally so; he cites references to Priscian by other 12th-century authors to support his claims.²⁴ Ultimately, the approach of scriptural exegesis was firmly rejected by Tony Hunt, who saw in Marie's reference to Priscian an association with the humanism of her own time.²⁵ Moreover, Kelly argues convincingly that Donovan's view that the Ancients were not intentionally obscure was inconsistent with textual evidence, noting that, "Marie's words suggest that the Ancients did know what they were obscuring, both by the intentionality expressed in the preposition of purpose *Pur* in v. 13, and by the sense of vv. 21–22, not considered by Donovan."²⁶

While all of these points of view have a certain merit in their own context and have done much to further our understanding of Marie's poetics, they have nonetheless stopped short of broadening the scope of her reference to Priscian, namely, by failing to consider the possibility that she may have had in mind another work from this 6th-century grammarian. Zanoni has suggested that Priscian's *Praeexercitamina* is also a viable candidate for Marie's citation.

The *Praeexercitamina* were Latin translations of the *Progymnasmata* of the 2nd-century rhetorician Hermogenes of Tarsus.²⁷ Kelly reminds

1936–1956 (Tübingen, 1959), pp. 8–14; D.W. Robertson, Jr., "Marie de France, *Lais*, Prologue, 13–16," *Modern Language Notes* 64 (1949), 336–38.

²⁴ Mortimer Donovan, "Priscian and the Obscurity of the Ancients," *Speculum* 36 (1961), 75–80. See also Ana-Maria Holzbacher, "El Prólogo de los *Lais*: no se ha dicho aún la última palabra," *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 41 (1987–88), 227–57. In reference to the 12th-century glossators that Donovan cites, Holzbacher states: "Por nuestra parte, nos parece que de estas citas podemos deducir: que la frase de Prisciano mencionada por otros autores no va en ellos ligada a la idea de oscuridad voluntaria; que Prisciano es dado como ejemplo de autor oscuro comentado por los glosadores, y, por último, que la frase de Prisciano aparece asociada a la idea de progresión y está apoyada por el ejemplo de los profetas" (p. 246).

²⁵ Hunt, "Glossing Marie," p. 407. He notes: "It emerges from such evidence [references to 12th-century glossators of Priscian] that, in her prologue, Marie probably refers not to the procedures of Scriptural exegesis but to the widespread concept of progress which characterized the centres of humanism in her day and which often attracted the tag from Priscian as an illustrative sententia."

²⁶ Douglas Kelly, "Obscurity and Memory: Sources for Invention in Medieval French Literature," in *Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lois Ebin (Kalamazoo, MI, 1984), pp. 33–56, here 35.

²⁷ Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, p. 72. For the divisions *De laude* and *De descriptione* of the *Praeexercitamina*, see Appendix A in my *Poetics of Memory*. For the full text of the *Institutiones* and the *Praeexercitamina*, see Heinrich Keil, ed., *Grammatici Latini*, 8 vols. (Leipzig, 1855–80; repr., Hildesheim, 1961). Martin Hertz has

us that these preparatory school exercises included “practice in invention” and “amplification of words and actions in description.”²⁸ These exercises were significant because, “as a supplement to his [Priscian’s] grammar, they brought the Latin Middle Ages the elements of Greek rhetorical theory, and did so with the omission of everything which was pertinent only to political and judicial oratory.”²⁹

The availability of the *Praeexercitamina* throughout the Middle Ages is well attested. Zanoni shows that they were often appended to manuscripts of the *Institutiones*.³⁰ One must also keep in mind that Marie’s literary training was no doubt completed before the appearance of popular treatises devoted solely to the arts of poetry and prose, such as Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria* (c. 1175) and Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Poetria nova* (c. 1210), and consequently depended on the more rhetorically oriented treatises that formed the base of medieval instruction, including the one currently under discussion. Zanoni notes that “Marie was, in short, a child of the older, more rhetorical school of poetic apprenticeship, and may well have been set the task of composing pieces in accordance with the recommendations of Priscian’s *Praeexercitamina* at some point in her schooling.” In her observations of possible texts available to Marie, in addition to Priscian’s *Institutiones* and *Praeexercitamina*, Zanoni specifically names Cicero’s *De inventione* and the pseudo-Ciceronian *ad Herennium*.³¹

When one considers Marie’s narrative design of consciously crafted description evident in all of her *lais*, the case for inclusion of the *Praeexercitamina* becomes even more appealing. That is to say this collection contains divisions that treat parts of composition vital to literary invention. In particular, the division *De descriptione* opens by discussing the various types of properties that can be described and by showing the importance of creating images that are visual to our imagination: “Descriptio est oratio colligens et praesentans oculis

edited the *Institutiones grammaticae* in this collection, vols. 2 and 3, and Keil has edited the *Opera minora* (including the *Praeexercitamina*), vol. 3.

²⁸ Douglas Kelly, *The Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Courtly Love* (Madison, WI, 1978), p. 34.

²⁹ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953; repr. Bollingen, 1973), p. 442.

³⁰ Zanoni, “Ceo Testimoine Preciens,” p. 410. “The *Praeexercitamina* were nearly, if not equally, as popular as the *Institutiones*” (p. 410, n. 9).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

quod demonstrat" [Description is speech that brings forth and makes present before the eyes the thing that it designates].³²

Priscian's opening sentence in this section on description reflects Marie's principal concern throughout all her works, especially throughout the *lais* that are contained in the same manuscript as the General Prologue in which the reference to the Latin grammarian is found. One has only to consider the detailed description of the magical ship, the androgynous hind, and the wall painting in the *lai* of Guigemar to see her skillful use of this technique. Marie, drawing on her knowledge of learned grammarians such as Priscian, understood the power of vivid descriptions like those that permeate the *Lais*. As Kelly has commented: "Marie de France learned from him [Priscian] how to pierce the obscurity of her sources and bring back past memory in language meaningful to her contemporaries. Hence, the Prologue to the *Lais* expresses a historical consciousness and the art which made it practicable in vernacular literature."³³

In light of the content in Priscian's Latin translation of these Greek exercises in style, Marie's reference to him in verses 9–22 of the General Prologue seems to include his writings in general, whether the *Institutiones* or the *Praeexercitamina*, and above all else to align herself with his venerable reputation through *auctoritas*.³⁴ By calling forth the authority of such an important figure in the history of medieval training in the arts of rhetoric and grammar, she not only justifies the process of topical invention that she undertakes but also empowers her own literary milieu—the Anglo-Angevin court for which she wrote—through the *topos* of *translatio studii* implicit in her reference to Priscian. Knowledge passes from the Greek world of Hermogenes

³² My translation. See Keil, *Grammatici Latini*, 3:430–40, the divisions of the *Praeexercitamina*, in order, are as follows: *De fabula*, *De narratione*, *De usu*, *De sententia*, *De refutatione* (*quam Graeci ANASKEUHN vocant*), *De loco communi*, *De laude*, *De comparatione*, *De allocutione*, *De descriptione*, *De positione*, and *De legis latione*.

³³ Kelly, "Obscurity," pp. 50–51.

³⁴ See Zanon, "'Ceo Testimoine Preciens,'" p. 411. She also concludes that Marie is referring to both of the Priscian texts instead of merely to the *Institutiones*: "Rather, the close thematic correspondence between the *Praeexercitamina* and Marie's Prologue would argue in favor of an interpretation that Marie, when she asserts that 'Ceo testimoine Preciens,' is accurately and fully revealing the sources of her literary discussion. Those sources are both the opening discourse of the *Institutiones* and also its companion piece, the *Praeexercitamina*; for both these works by Priscian were probably very well known to Marie as the school texts from which she had received her early training in the sister arts of Latin grammar and rhetoric."

to the Roman world of Priscian, and then to Marie's medieval England and France.

Later in the General Prologue, Marie announces the role that memory plays in the preservation of material from the past and in the transmission of that material to the present culture. Just as verses 1–22 establish an important part of her poetic design, verses 33–42 also represent her goal of writing:

Des lais pensai k'oï aveie;
 Ne dutai pas, bien le saveie,
 Ke pur *remembrance* les firent
 Des aventures k'il oïrent
 Cil ki primes les comencierent
 E ki avant les enveierent.
 Plusurs en ai oï conter,
 Ne[s] voil laisser *ně oblier*;
 Rimez en ai e fait ditié,
 Soventes fiez en ai veillié. (vv. 33–42, my emphasis)

[So I thought of lays which I had heard and did not doubt, for I knew it full well, that they were composed, by those who first began them and put them into circulation, to perpetuate the memory of adventures they had heard. I myself have heard a number of them and do not wish to overlook or neglect them. I have put them into verse, made poems from them and worked on them late into the night.]

These lines recall the same theme from the beginning of the prologue, the way in which Marie will draw on source material to create stories that are uniquely fashioned after her own poetic perspective. She “invents” them, that is to say she reconstructs them to fit her own literary plan.

In verse 35 of the General Prologue, Marie de France asserts that the authors (Bretons) of the *lais* that she has heard originally made them in order to perpetuate the memory of the stories from which they were composed: “Ke pur *remembrance* les firent.” Likewise Marie, in her turn, is interested in preserving these stories for posterity, and she proclaims that she “Nes voil laisser ne oblier” (v. 40). She has worked hard, “Soventes fiez en ai veillié” (v. 42), to ensure that this material will be remembered in the future. Part of this labor has involved the attention to descriptions that she learned from Priscian.

The word *remember*, and any of its forms such as *remembrance*, are not serendipitous vocabulary choices for Marie. Nor is it by chance that the word *remembrance* appears in the General Prologue, where

Marie uses it to demonstrate the significance of memory to the process of topical invention. Terms that evoke the process of memory are always strategically placed throughout her texts to give significance to the surrounding textual elements. Moreover, of the occasions on which the name Marie appears in a prologue or epilogue of the works considered here—once in the prologue to *Guigemar* in the *Lais*, once in the epilogue to the *Fables* (Marie “de France”), once in the epilogue to the *Espurgatoire*, and once in the epilogue to the *Audree*—it is presented alongside words that refer to memory.

The final section of the General Prologue contains the dedication to her patron, most likely Henry II Plantagenet:

En l'honor de vus, nobles reis,
 Ki tant estes pruz e curteis,
 A ki tute joie se encline,
 E en ki quoer tuz biens racine,
 M'entremis des lais assembler,
 Par rime faire e raconter.
 En mun quoer pensoe e diseie,
 Sire, ke[s] vos presentereie;
 Si vos les plaist a recevoir,
 Mult me ferez grant joie avoir,
 A tuz jurz mais en serrai lie.
 Ne me tenez a surquidie
 Si vos os faire ices present.
 Ore oëz le comencement! (vv. 43–56)

[In your honour, noble king, you who are so worthy and courtly, you to whom all joys pay homage and in whose heart all true virtue has taken root, did I set myself to assemble lays, to compose and relate them in rhyme. In my heart, lord, I thought and decided that I should present them to you, so if it pleased you to accept them, you would bring me great happiness and I would rejoice evermore. Do not consider me presumptuous if I make so bold as to offer you this gift. Now hear the beginning.]

The closing lines of this prologue serve Marie well and are intended to guarantee the reception of her work. They clearly present her king as worthy (*nobles*) and courtly (*curteis*) as she humbly beseeches him to accept her gift. The theme of courtliness (*curteisie*) appears regularly throughout the *lais*, and Marie's characters are rewarded if they exemplify this quality, or punished if they lack it. Marie presents Henry II as an honorable and courtly king in whose heart all virtue is born, or literally “has taken root” (“en ki quoer tuz biens racine”). The botanical

metaphor here recalls the flower metaphor from verses 6–8 and reinforces the theme of fecundity present throughout the *lais*. But Henry will later learn from her tales that *curteisie* is a virtue that must be maintained if one wishes to remain a prosperous king. She uses the same adjective, *curteis*, to describe King Equitan and King Arthur at the beginning of *Equitan* (v. 11) and *Lanval* (v. 6), respectively. However, both kings eventually fall from narrative grace as a result of their less than courtly actions: the former loses his life because he sleeps with the wife of his faithful seneschal, while the latter loses a noble knight (Lanval) by forgetting to reward him for his loyal service and by believing the false accusations of his queen. Finally, these verses reinforce Marie's project of *inventio* by asserting how she will take pre-existing material and assemble it into a new form for a new audience ("M'entremis des *lais* assembler, / Par rime faire e reconter").

II. *The Lais*

The definition of the *lai* as a genre has been the subject of debate for many years.³⁵ As far as we know, Marie de France was the first author to compose narrative *lais*, brief tales in octosyllabic rhymed couplets based on oral stories she claims to have heard from the Bretons (see the General Prologue above),³⁶ whom she often mentions in the opening and closing comments of individual *lais*.³⁷ These stories are almost always set in the Celtic world, more precisely within the geography of England (*Bretagne majeur*) and Brittany (*Bretagne mineur*); the action of *Les Deus Amanz* takes place in Normandy. Glyn S. Burgess notes that Marie's prologues to the *lais* constitute a total of 110 lines of text, ranging from two lines in *Le Fresne* to 26 lines in *Guigemar*.

³⁵ For a full discussion on the definition of the *lai* as a genre, see the part of Jean Frappier's study titled "Remarques sur la structure du lai, essai de définition et de classement," in his edited collection *La littérature narrative de l'imagination, des genres littéraires aux techniques de l'expression, Colloque de Strasbourg, 23–25 avril 1959* (Paris, 1961), pp. 23–29.

³⁶ On two occasions Marie mentions in the epilogues that the *lai* she has put into narrative form originally had a musical quality: *Guigemar* (vv. 885–86) and *Chevrefoil* (vv. 112–13).

³⁷ Marie refers to the Bretons or the Breton language in the prologues to *Guigemar* (v. 20), *Equitan* (v. 2), *Bisclavret* (v. 3), *Lanval* (v. 4), *Les Deus Amanz* (v. 4), *Laüstic* (v. 2), and *Eliduc* (v. 1), and in the epilogues to *Equitan* (v. 312), *Lanval* (v. 642), *Les Deus Amanz* (v. 244), *Laüstic* (v. 159), and *Eliduc* (v. 1182).

He further observes that Marie uses the term *lai* or *lais* in each of the 12 prologues,³⁸ demonstrating that the oral version of the genre existed before her time and that she understood what it represented.

Guigemar, the first *lai* after the General Prologue in Harley 978, opens with a prologue constructed according to the same rhetorical plan as the larger prologue that precedes it. Possibly intended as the original prologue to the entire collection of *lais*,³⁹ it seeks to capture the attention of the audience by presenting Marie de France's justification for writing and by evoking the faculty of memory:

Ki de bone mateire traite,
Mult li peise si bien n'est faite.
Oëz, seignurs, ke dit Marie,
Ki en sun tens pas ne s'oblie. (vv. 1–4)

[Whoever has good material for a good story is grieved if the tale is not well told. Her, my lords, the words of Marie, who, when she has the opportunity, does not squander her talents.]

The first two verses of this prologue mirror the first four of the General Prologue by stating the *causa scribendi* from the very beginning of the text. Furthermore, Marie's name in these opening lines is associated with the process of memory, as it will be in the epilogues to the *Fables*, the *Espurgatoire*, and the *Audree*. She does not waste her talent for composing pleasant stories and is not forgotten among the authors of her time ("en sun temps pas ne s'oblie").

In the verses that follow, Pickens has identified the opposition of the expressions *en bien parler* (to praise and acclaim) and *mesparler* (to misspeak or slander) as "the major theme of the *Guigemar* prologue":⁴⁰

Celui deivent la gent loër
Ki *en bien* fait de sei *parler*.
Mais quant il ad en un païs
Hummë u femme de grant pris,
Cil ki de sun bien unt envie
Sovent en dient vileinie;
Sun pris li volent abeisser:
Pur ceo comencent le mestier
Del malveis chien coart felun,

³⁸ See his chapter in this book, "Marie de France and the Anonymous Lays."

³⁹ See notes 9 and 10.

⁴⁰ Rupert T. Pickens, "En bien parler and mesparler: Fecundity and Sterility in the Works of Marie de France," *Le Cygne*, n.s. 3 (2005), 7–22, here 7.

Ki mort la gent par traïsun.
 Nel voil mie pur ceo leissier,
 Si gangleür u losengier
 Le me volent a mal turner;
 Ceo est lur dreit de *mesparler*. (vv. 5–18, my emphasis)

[Those who gain a good reputation should be commended, but when there exists in a country a man or woman of great renown, people who are envious of their abilities frequently speak insultingly of them in order to damage this reputation. Thus they start acting like a vicious, cowardly, treacherous dog which will bite others out of malice. But just because spiteful tittle-tattlers attempt to find fault with me I do not intend to give up. They have a right to make slanderous remarks.]

By juxtaposing *en bien parler* and *mesparler*, these lines reflect a narrative structure prominent throughout the *lais*: the difference between courtliness and uncourtliness. As mentioned earlier, characters in Marie's stories are rewarded when they exemplify *curteisie*, such as in the case of Guigemar's behavior and discourse in the presence of the lady who has been imprisoned by her jealous husband. By contrast, they are punished when they exhibit uncourtly conduct: Bisclavret is betrayed by his wife (*trahiz*, v. 125; cf. v. 14 above), who then has her nose bitten off by her husband when he is in beastly form. Likewise, the lady in Fresne who slandered (*mesparla*, v. 65) her neighbor for having twins and, according to the belief at the time, for supposedly having slept with two men, finds herself in the same condition during the very year in which she misspoke.⁴¹

Two predominate themes throughout the prologues and epilogues to the individual *lais* are adventure and memory.⁴² According to Prudence Mary O'Hara Tobin, "ces compositions [*lais*] commémoraien

⁴¹ Pickens, "En bien parler," p. 15.

⁴² See Rothschild, "Literary and Socio-Cultural Aspects." She has noticed that *vérité* also makes a fairly frequent appearance in the opening and closing commentaries to the *lais*. Marie uses terms that express "truth" in the prologues to *Guigemar* (*verrais*, v. 19) and *Eliduc* (*vérité*, v. 4), in the epilogue to *Bisclavret* (*veraie*, v. 317), and in the prologue and epilogue to *Chevrefoil* (*vérité*, vv. 3 and 117). She also expresses the sentiment through constructions such as *cum dit vus ai* (*Equitan*, v. 311 and *Les Deus Amanz*, v. 243), *n'en dutez mie* (*Bisclavret*, v. 316), and *cum ele avient* (*Lanval*, v. 2). Her frequent attestation of truth seems to have been refuted around 1180 by one of her contemporaries, Denis Piramus, in his *Vie seint Edmund le rei* where he mentions "Dame Marie": "Ki en rime fist e basti / E compassa les vers de lais, / Ke ne sunt pas del tut verais" [who put into rhyme, constructed, and arranged verses of *lais*, which are not true at all (not completely true?)] (vv. 36–38). See Busby, "The Manuscripts," where he cites Hilding Kjellman, ed., *La vie seint Edmund le rei, poème anglo-normand du XII^e siècle* (Göteborg, 1935). Busby's translation.

un événement, une légende, une *aventure* dont elles s'inspiraient."⁴³ In fact, the 12 stories in Marie's collection almost always contain the element of *aventure* that is at the heart of medieval French romance, though it is presented in a more abbreviated form and generally with less emphasis on intentionally seeking the adventure. She employs the term *aventure* or *aventures* in seven of the prologues and six of the epilogues:⁴⁴ in the prologues to *Guigemar* (v. 24), *Equitan* (v. 5), *Lanval* (v. 1), *Deus Amanz* (v. 2), *Yonec* (v. 3), *Laüstic* (v. 1), and *Chaitivel* (v. 3); and in the epilogues to *Fresne* (v. 1), *Bisclavret* (v. 315), *Les Deus Amanz* (v. 1), *Yonec* (v. 551), *Laüstic* (v. 157), and *Eliduc* (v. 1181).⁴⁵

The prologues and epilogues to the stories in the collection are replete with terms that evoke memory, a central concern of Marie de France not only in the *Lais* but in her other works as well. As we have seen in the prologue to *Guigemar*, the first *lai*, Marie is not forgotten in her time ("en sun temps pas ne s'oblie"). The prologue to *Equitan*, the next *lai* after *Guigemar*, is even more direct in its evocation of memory:

Mut unt esté noble barun
Cil de Bretaine, li Bretun.
Jadis suleient par prüesce,
Par curteisie et par noblesce,
Des aventures que oiëent,
Ki a plusur gent aveneient,
Fere les lais *pur remembrance*,
Que [hum] *nes meist en ubliance*.
Un en firent, ceo oi cunter,
Ki *ne fet mie a ublier*. (vv. 1–10, my emphasis)

[The Bretons, who lived in Brittany, were fine and noble people. In days gone by these valiant, courtly and noble men (the Bretons) composed lays for posterity and thus preserved them from oblivion. These lays were based on adventures they had heard and which had befallen many a person. One of them, which I have heard recited, should not be forgotten.]

⁴³ Prudence Mary O'Hara Tobin, ed., *Les lais anonymes des XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, (Publications Romanes et Françaises) 143 (Geneva, 1976), p. 9.

⁴⁴ See Burgess, "Anonymous Lays." He makes the same observation as he compares the prologues and epilogues of Marie's *lais* to those in the *lais anonymes*. He also points out that "Marie often reveals in her prologues the names of the protagonists of the lay (e.g. *Equitan*, v. 11, *Yonec*, vv. 9–10, *Chevrefoil*, v. 7) or its title (e.g. *Le Fresne*, v. 1, *Deus Amanz*, v. 6, *Laüstic*, v. 3, *Milun*, v. 5, *Chaitivel*, vv. 6–8, *Chevrefoil*, v. 2)." See also Rothschild, "Literary and Socio-Cultural Aspects," where she notes a "multiplicity or choice of various language names for certain *lais* as indicated in their respective prologues (*Bisclavret*, *Laüstic*, *Chevrefoil*, *Eliduc*)."

⁴⁵ Marie also uses the term *aventures* in v. 36 of the General Prologue.

Faced with the potential threat of oblivion of the adventures in question, the Bretons composed a *lai* to assure their preservation. This is also the case for the opening of *Bisclavret*, where Marie wants to guard against a loss of memory: “Quant de lais faire m’entremet, / Ne voil ublier Bisclavret [In my effort to compose lays I do not wish to omit *Bisclavret*] (vv. 1–2). In fact, Marie’s fear of this *lai* being forgotten, and its veracity disbelieved, is apparently so strong that she reminds the audience in the epilogue that the *lai* of *Bisclavret* was made to be remembered:

L’aventure ke avez oïe
 Veraie fu, n’en dutez mie.
 De Bisclavret fu fet li lais
 Pur remembrance a tutdis mais. (vv. 315–18)

[The adventure you have heard actually took place, do not doubt it. The lay was composed about Bisclavret to be remembered for ever more.]

Thus *Bisclavret* begins and ends by invoking the act of memory.

That Marie desires to remember her sources and the story she creates from them is also attested by her opening couplet to *Chaitivel*: “Talent me prist de remembrer / Un lai dunt jo oï parler” [I am minded to recall a lay of which I have heard] (vv. 1–2). This desire to remember is also shared by Tristan, who, as we are told in the epilogue to *Chevrefoil*, composes a *lai* so that his adventures with his lover Iseut are not forgotten: “Pur les paroles remembrer, / Tristram, ki bien saveit harper, / En aveit fet un nuvel lai” [Tristram, a skilful harpist, in order to record his words (as the queen had said he should), used them to create a new lay] (vv. 111–13). Finally, just as the *Lais* begin in the General Prologue with a statement of the significance of memory, “Ke pur remembrance les firent” [they (the lays) were composed...to perpetuate the memory] (v. 35), so too does the collection end with a similar reminder in the final verses of *Eliduc*:

De l’aventure de ces treis
 Li auntien Bretun curteis
 Firent le lai *pur remembrer*,
 Que hum *nel deüst pas oblier*. (vv. 1181–84, my emphasis)

[From the story of these three the ancient courtly Bretons composed a lay to be remembered, so that it should not be forgotten.]

In this way, memory has the first and last words in the *Lais*.

III. *The Fables* (Isopet)

Isopets are collections of Aesopic fables from the Greek Phaedrean tradition that were accessible to medieval French authors through Latin adaptations, like those of Romulus. The *Isopets* were composed in Old French, especially in octosyllabic rhymed couplets, though sometimes later in prose as well.⁴⁶ The earliest version of the Old French *Isopet*, Marie de France's collection of 102 fables, was composed probably between 1167 and 1189 and has survived in 25 manuscripts dating from the early 13th century through the end of the 15th, and the first 15 lines of one of her fables, *Del fevre e de la cuinee* [*The Blacksmith and the Axe*], appear in a fragment of Nottingham University Library Mi Lm 6.⁴⁷

Like her *Lais*, Marie's *Fables* open with a prologue, but whereas the *Lais* lack a formal epilogue for the whole work, the *Fables* end with closing remarks that summarize the author's reason for assembling the brief narrative tales that precede it. All but three of the extant manuscripts of the *Fables* contain the prologue, and 15 of them have the epilogue; all the manuscripts that have the epilogue also have the prologue, and only two manuscripts contain neither the prologue nor the epilogue.⁴⁸ These opening and closing passages are significant to Marie's poetics because they take up again the same rhetorical techniques as those found in the General Prologue to the *Lais* and in the prologue to the first *lai*, *Guigemar*.

⁴⁶ For a clear and concise summary of the complex literary tradition of the Old French *Isopets*, see Hans R. Runte, "Fable (Isopet)," in *Medieval France*, ed. Kibler and Zinn, pp. 331–32. For a more detailed explanation of the tradition as it pertains to Marie's collection, see the Introduction to the 2nd edition of Charles Brucker, *Marie de France, Les Fables: Edition critique accompagnée d'une introduction, d'une traduction, de notes et d'un glossaire* (Louvain, 1991; 2nd ed., 1998), pp. 1–18. The discussion in this section owes much to my *Poetics of Memory*, ch. 4.

⁴⁷ Françoise Vieliard, "Sur la tradition manuscrite des *Fables* de Marie de France," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartres* 147 (1989), 371–97, esp. 381. For further discussion on the manuscript tradition of Marie's *Fables*, see Busby, "The Manuscripts" and *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 2002), 1:465–80.

⁴⁸ See Appendix B, "Table of Extant Medieval Manuscripts of Marie de France's *Isopet*," in my *Poetics of Memory*, pp. 184–85. BL, Cotton Vespasian B. XIV does not contain the epilogue but at one time contained the prologue. However, the two folios before the first fable (fol. 19r) appear to have been cut out, and all that remains of the prologue are the two verses "Et qüt tel home nen ad requisite / Ne voil laisser en nul guise." Only BnF, fr. 4939 and fr. 24130 contain neither the prologue nor the epilogue.

As we will see below, royal patronage appears to have been one reason for Marie's recording her own version of Aesopic fables and also was one of her reasons for composing the *Lais* that she dedicated to Henry II. However, she reveals another literary agenda in the opening lines of the prologue to the *Fables*:

Cil ki seivent de lettr[e]ure
 deveient bien mettre [lur] cure
 es bons livres e [es] escriz
 e as [es]samples e as diz
 ke li philosophe troverent
 e escristrent e remembrerent:
 par moralité escriveient
 les bons pruverbes qu'il oieient
 que cil amender se peüssent
 ki lur entente en bien eüssent;
 ceo firent li ancien pere. (vv. 1–10)⁴⁹

[All the good books, writings, fables, and proverbs that thinkers have composed, written, and transcribed should truly be heeded by well-read people, for the ancients who wrote down these good proverbs that they heard did so for the purpose of moral edification, in order that those who set their mind upon the good might improve themselves.]

The appeal not to neglect a literary talent found in the first two verses (*lettreure*), as well as the references to the “philosophe” of verse five and “li ancien pere” of verse 10, clearly recall the rhetorical elements of the opening verses to the General Prologue of the *Lais* discussed above. Furthermore, the verb *resembler* in verse six evokes the theme of memory from the General Prologue (vv. 35 and 40) and the prologue to *Guigemar* (v. 4).⁵⁰

The prologue of the *Fables* continues with the same rhetoric Marie employs in her comments that precede the *Lais*:

Romulus, ki fu emperere,
 a sun fiz escrit, si manda
 e par essample li mustra
 cum il se deust cuntreguaiter

⁴⁹ References to Marie de France's *Fables* are from Charles Brucker, 2nd edition (see n. 46). All English translations of the *Fables* are from Mary-Lou Martin, trans., *The Fables of Marie de France: an English Translation* (Birmingham, AL, 1982).

⁵⁰ Martin translates here *remembrerent* as “transcribed.” While that translation is valid, in the context of this discussion I would give *remembrerent* its rhetorical significance of “memory” within the process of *inventio* as discussed above.

que hum nel p[e]ust enginner.
 Esop[es] escrist a sun mestre
 que bien cunust lui e sun estre,
 unes fables ke ot trovees,
 de griu en latin translatees. (vv. 12–20)

[Romulus, who was emperor, wrote to his son and declared this, showing him through an exemplum how he should guard himself against being deceived. Aesop, who well knew his master and his way of thinking, wrote for him a collection of fables which he had composed and translated from Greek into Latin.]

Although Romulus and Aesop are not grammarians like Priscian, whom Marie cites in the General Prologue, their names nonetheless serve the same rhetorical function here of *auctoritas*. In the same way that Aesop is an author of fables that pass from Greek into Latin through the process of *translatio*, Marie adapts for her own audience fables that she brings from Latin into the vernacular. Moreover, the verb *trover* (vv. 5 and 19) is a word that belongs to the process of medieval *inventio* and, in the context of literary composition, means “to find” a work (“unes fables ke ot trovees”), in other words, “to invent” or “to compose” it.

The final verses of the prologue to the *Fables* express Marie’s dedication of her collection and reflect her encomium of Henry II in the General Prologue to the *Lais*:

A mei, ki dei la rime faire,
 n’avenist nient a retraire
 plusurs paroles que i sunt;
 mes nepuruc cil me sumunt
 ki flurs est de chevalerie,
 d’enseignement, de curteisie;
 e quant tel hume me ad requise,
 ne voil lesser en nule guise
 que n’i mette travail e peine,
 ki que m’en tienge pur vileine,
 de fere mut pur sa preere. (vv. 27–37)

[It was not at all becoming to me, whose task it was to compose the verse, to repeat several words which are found here, but nevertheless he who is the flower of chivalry, of learning, and of courtliness commissioned me, and when such a man has commanded me, in no way do I want to neglect being diligent and thorough about it, no matter who may take me for uncourtly. I must do my best on account of his request.]

As she did in her prefatory comments to the *Lais*, Marie emphasizes here that her patron is “curteis.” In fact, she opposes in these verses “courtliness” (v. 32, *curteisie*) and uncourtliness (v. 36, *vileine*) just as she did in the prologue to *Guigemar* with the expressions *en bien parler* and *mesparler*. Furthermore, the floral image (*flurs*) here recalls the one associated with Henry II in the opening to the *Lais* (*racine*). We learn in the epilogue that the “flower of chivalry” is a certain Count William:

Pur amur le cunte Willame,
le plus vaillant de nul realme,
m'entremis de cest livre feire
e de l'engleis en romanz treire.
Esopë apel'um cest livre,
qu'il translata e fist escrire,
del griu en latin le turna.
Li reis Alvrez, que mut l'ama,
le translata puis en engleis,
e jeo l'ai rimee en franceis,
si cum jeo poi plus proprement. (Epilogue, vv. 9–19)

[For the love of Count William, the most valiant of this realm, I undertook to write this book and to translate it from English into French. This book is called *Ysopet*, after the one who translated it from Greek into Latin and had it written down. King Alfred, who esteemed it highly, then translated it into English, and I have rendered it, exactly as I have found it, into French verse.]

It may never be possible to determine the true identity of this William, but there have been numerous attempts made over the past century to ascertain exactly who commissioned Marie to write this collection of fables and to whom she dedicates her work.⁵¹ Marie's claim to have translated a collection of fables written in English is increasingly viewed with skepticism in modern scholarship.⁵²

⁵¹ See in particular the introduction to the translation of the *Lais* by Burgess and Busby, pp. 15–19. For the numerous articles that have been published on this subject, see Burgess, *Marie de France: An Analytical Bibliography* (London, 1977; Supplement no. 1, 1986; Supplement no. 2, 1997; Supplement no. 3, 2007).

⁵² See Runte, “Fable (Isopet).” The view that Marie faithfully translated an English collection was held by Eduard Mall, “Zur Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Fabelliteratur und insbesondere des *Esope* der Marie de France,” *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 9 (1885), 161–203, and by Karl Warnke, “Die Quellen des *Esope* der Marie de France,” in *Forschungen zur romanischen Philologie: Festgabe für Hermann Suchier* (Halle, 1900), pp. 161–284.

Perhaps the most celebrated verses in discussions of Marie de France's identity are found at the beginning of the epilogue to her fable collection:

Al finement de cest escrit
 que en romanz ai treité e dit,
 me numerai pur remembrance:
Marie ai nun, si sui de France.
 Put cel estre que clerz plusur
 prendereient sur eus mun labur,
 ne voil que nul sur li le die;
 cil fet que fol ki sei ublie. (Epilogue, vv. 1–8, my emphasis)

[At the conclusion of this work, which I have written and narrated in French, I shall name myself for posterity: Marie is my name, and I am from France. It may be that many writers will claim my work as their own, but I want no one else to attribute it to himself. He who lets himself fall into oblivion does a poor job.]

In the only instance in all her works in which Marie identifies herself as “de France,” she chooses “remembrance” for rhyme in the couplet, “me numerai pur remembrance: / Marie ai nun, si sui de France.” Furthermore, she reinforces the theme of memory a few verses later with the expression “cil fet que fol ki sei ublie.” Marie's concern here that others may try to claim her work as their own, and that she will be remembered, are particularly important to a woman writing in an otherwise male-dominated milieu.

IV. *The Espurgatoire seint Patriz and the Vie seinte Audree*

In the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz* and the *Vie seinte Audree*, Marie de France's focus as author shifts to hagiographic texts, but a close reading shows that her vernacular training in the arts of poetry and prose still informs the narratives, and even clearly manifests its presence at times as she brings these two stories to a lay audience.⁵³

According to the legend of Purgatory as developed by H. of Sal-trey in his *De Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*,⁵⁴ St Patrick has a church and

⁵³ See my *Poetics of Memory*, pp. 137–73.

⁵⁴ Many writers have conventionally expanded the “H.” in H. of Saltrey, as it appears in the manuscript, to “Henry.” However, Yolande de Pontfarcy shows that there is really no scholarly basis for this choice, and she points out that the name “Henry” is not found in the Latin source, *De Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*. See p. 5, n. 11,

monastery built in an attempt to evangelize the area around Lough Derg in Ireland. After the local inhabitants fail to heed his admonitions to lead a purer life, he prays for God's assistance, which arrives in the form of revelation of the entrance to Purgatory. He makes the journey there and sees both the torment of sinners and the eventual bliss of those who enter the celestial paradise. He returns, has a wall constructed around the entrance, and leaves the area in the charge of the monastery. The monks later record various accounts of Purgatory provided by others who made the journey and returned safely.⁵⁵

Marie de France's translation of the monk of Saltrey's text consists of 2,302 lines arranged in octosyllabic rhymed couplets and is preserved in a single manuscript dating from the end of the 13th century, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 25407.⁵⁶ It is likely that she wrote the *Espurgatoire* sometime between 1190 and the turn of the century.⁵⁷ Although her text follows fairly closely the *Purgatorio*'s text, part of the prologue and all the epilogue of the work are her own:

...voil en romanz mettre en escrit,
si cum(e) li livres le nus dit,
en remembrance et en memoire,
des peines de l'Espurgatoire. (vv. 3–6)

[I wish to put into writing in French, / The Pains of Purgatory, / Just as
the book tells us about them, / As a recollection and record.]

In verses three and four Marie presents the same themes found in previous prologues. She is participating in the poetics of *translatio studii* as she brings into French a Latin work that enjoyed great success dur-

in her edition of the text, *Marie de France, L'Espurgatoire Saint Patriz: nouvelle édition critique accompagnée du De Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* (éd. de Warnke), *d'une introduction, d'une traduction, de notes et d'un glossaire* (Louvain, 1995). All references to the *Espurgatoire* are from this edition. All English translations of the *Espurgatoire* are from *Saint Patrick's Purgatory: A Poem by Marie de France, Translated with an Introduction and Notes*, trans. Michael J. Curley (New York, 1993).

⁵⁵ For further discussion on Marie de France's and the monk of Saltrey's versions, see Mickel, *Marie de France*, pp. 41–49.

⁵⁶ For descriptions of this manuscript, see Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, pp. 19–22; Karl Warnke, ed., *Das Buch vom Espurgatoire S. Patrice der Marie de France und seine Quelle* (Halle, 1938), p. 65; and Busby, "The Manuscripts."

⁵⁷ For dating the *Espurgatoire*, see Bruckner, "Marie de France," in *Medieval France*, ed. Kibler and Zinn; Mickel, *Marie de France*, p. 41; and Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, pp. 4–10.

ing her time.⁵⁸ By citing her source here (*li livres* = the *Purgatorio*), she gives credibility to her own endeavor, as she did in the prologue and epilogue of the *Fables* (Aesop) and in the prologue to *Guigemar* (the Bretons), as well as in many of the prologues and epilogues of the individual *lais* (the Bretons). Moreover, H. of Saltrey mentions memory in prefatory comments to his *Purgatorio*, but his actual prologue is silent on the subject. Marie, by contrast, explicitly states that her purpose in translating the story into French is to preserve its memory as she uses both *remembrance* and *memoire* in the same verse,⁵⁹ reflecting her concern with this faculty as expressed in the prologues and epilogues discussed above. She will later echo these themes in her epilogue of the same work:

Jo(e), Marie, ai mis, en memoire,
le livre de l'Espurgatoire
en romanz, k'il seit entendables
a laie genz e convenables. (vv. 2297–300)

[I, Marie, have put / The Book of Purgatory into French, / As a record,
so that it might be intelligible / And suited to lay folk.]

Given the consistent references to memory in all her other major prologues and epilogues, it comes as no surprise here that she gives her name in the same verse as *memoire*,⁶⁰ just as she chooses *remembrance* for the rhyme of her name (*de France*) in the epilogue of the *Fables*. The *Espurgatoire* will be remembered, but so will its author for having made the story available to a new audience.

As June Hall McCash has shown in detail, the similarities between the *Audree* and the *Espurgatoire* are striking, especially in their prologues and epilogues.⁶¹ Marie's source for her book on the life of Saint Audrey (*Æthelthryth* or *Etheldreda*), "a text very close to that in a late 13th- or early 14th-century MS, BL, Cotton Domitian A xv, ... has

⁵⁸ See Mickel, *Marie de France*, p. 42. He has shown that the story of St Patrick's Purgatory enjoyed great success in medieval literature for more than three hundred years, and that references to it appeared in literature that followed.

⁵⁹ For commentary on the use of these terms in the same verse, see my *Poetics of Memory*, pp. 30–31.

⁶⁰ Curley's translation here of "have put ... as a record" for "ai mis, en memoire," is accurate, since the Latin verb *recordor*, that gives the English "to record," is etymologically linked to memory (to recollect, to remember, to recall). See Denise McClelland, *Le vocabulaire dans les Lais de Marie de France* (Ottawa, 1977), p. 54.

⁶¹ See her "Gendered Sanctity" and "A Fourth Text by Marie de France?" See also my *Poetics of Memory*, pp. 159–73.

much in common with the *Liber Eliensis* [*Book of Ely*].”⁶² This story recounts the life of Saint Audrey, queen of Northumbria in the middle of the 7th century, including the translation of her body and various miracles associated with her.

The prologue of this work presents the same elements found in Marie’s other prologues examined earlier:

An bon hovre e en bon porpens
 Devroit chascun user son tens.
 Pur sage devroit hon tenir
 Celui ke porroit sovenir
 Dont il est fait, qui le cria,
 Et quel part il revertira. (vv. 1–6)⁶³

[For a good work and for a good purpose / should each person use his time. / It would be wise / for everyone to remember / what he is made of, who made him, / and whither he shall return.]

She begins here with the same justification for writing that she offered in the opening verses of the General Prologue and the prologue of the *Fables*, that each person should spend his or her time on a worthy cause. She also highlights here the importance of memory (*souvenir*), just as she has done before in her prologues.

Furthermore, Marie ends the *Audree* with an epilogue that emphasizes material from previous prologues and epilogues, particularly the significance of memory:

Issi ay ceo livre finé
 En romanz dit et translaté
 De la vie seintë Audree
 Si com en latin l’ay trové,
 Et les miracles ay oÿ,
 Ne voil nul mettrë *en obli*.
 Pur ce depri la gloriuse
 Seinte Audree la precieuse
 Par sa pité k’a moy entende
 Et ce servise a m’ame rende,
 Et ceus pur ki ge la depri
 K’el lur aït par sa merci.
 Mut par est fol ki *se oblie*.

⁶² Pickens, “*Translatrix* II.” He offers in this chapter a detailed and thorough discussion on the complexity of the source for Marie’s *Audree*.

⁶³ All references and English translations for *La Vie seinte Audree* are from the McCash and Barban edition (see n. 2).

Ici escriis mon non Marie
 Pur ce ke soie *remembree*. (vv. 4611–25, my emphasis)

[Now I have finished this book, / told and translated into French / the life of Saint Audrey / just as I found it in Latin, / along with the miracles I have heard. / I do not wish to let anything be forgotten. / Therefore I beseech glorious, / precious Saint Audrey / to hear me out of compassion / and give aid to my soul, / as well as to those for whom I pray: / may she help them through her mercy. / One is indeed foolish who forgets herself: / here I write my name “Marie” / so that I may be remembered.]

As in the prologue and epilogue of the *Espurgatoire* and in the epilogue of the *Fables*, Marie reminds us as she closes the *Audree* that she once again plays a key role in the process of *translatio studii* as she composes her work from a Latin model (“En romanz dit et translaté”). And as she does in the prologues and epilogues of the *Lais*, *Fables*, and *Espurgatoire*, she especially stresses the value of memory in the *Audree* epilogue by invoking the faculty three times in just 15 verses (*en obli*, *se oblie*, and *remembree*). Finally, by placing her name at the end of the penultimate verse of the *Audree* and by arranging the word *remembree* at the end of the last verse, she associates her identity quite literally with memory, as she did in the prologue of *Guigemar* (*Marie/ne s’oblie* at the rhyme) and in the epilogues of the *Fables* (*remembrance/de France* at the rhyme) and *Espurgatoire* (*Marie/memoire* in the same verse). Thus she assures that she will always be remembered as the author of her works.

V. Conclusion

In all major prologues and epilogues to her writings, Marie de France explicitly uses rhetorical literary devices to capture the attention of her audience, to present her justification for writing, and to demonstrate that she participates in the processes of *inventio* and *translatio studii* as she adapts her source material for her audience. Her prologues and epilogues often contain references to themes that are ubiquitous in the works that they open and close, as is the case with her opening and closing remarks to the individual *lais* that often mention the word *aventure*. Moreover, in the General Prologue to the *Lais* and in the prologues and epilogues to the *Fables*, the *Espurgatoire*, and the *Audree*, she always evokes the faculty of memory in some way. On every occasion that the name “Marie” appears in a prologue or epilogue it is associated syntactically with a word or expression related

to memory. No other author of medieval vernacular literature writing during Marie's period or before her stressed the importance of memory in their prologues and epilogues to the extent that she did in hers. Marie's contemporary, Chrétien de Troyes, for example, refers to memory only once in the prologues to his five romances, when he states at the beginning of *Erec et Enide*: "Des or comancerai l'estoire / qui toz jorz mes iert an mimoire" [Now I shall begin the story / which evermore will be in memory] (vv. 23–24).⁶⁴

The prologues and epilogues of any literary work are important in relation to the texts they frame, and those of Marie de France are no exception. They are the blueprint of her poetic art with which she carefully constructs her narratives. The techniques of *captatio benevolentiae*, *causa scribendi*, and *auctoritas* that she employs in the General Prologue and elsewhere demonstrate that she recognized the power of rhetoric within the creative process of medieval literary *inventio* as she strove to assure the survival of her stories and her name for future generations.

⁶⁴ Verses and translation are from Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, ed. and trans. Carleton W. Carroll (New York and London, 1987).

CHAPTER TWO

MARIE DE FRANCE AND THE LEARNED TRADITION

Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr.

Judging from the production of manuscripts in the northern areas, French vernacular literature burst on the scene in France, Flanders, and England in the mid-12th century. The *romans d'antiquité*, the *romans* (that is, works translated into Old French) drawn from the Latin of Virgil, Statius, and Quintus Curtius, and the *Roman de Troie* from Dares and Dictys, demonstrate both an acquaintance with and an interest in the major literary/historical *matière* of classical antiquity. But the bombshell that was Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* in 1136, followed by Wace's *Brut*, the expanded Old French version of 1155, introduced the "matière de Bretagne," thus filling out the classification of Old French literature defined later by Jean Bodel as the *matière de France*, *matière de Rome*, and *matière de Bretagne*.¹

Whereas the *matière de France* might be seen as popular history drawn from legend or oral narratives, the *romans d'antiquité* were translated and rewritten narratives whose characters and stories were already well defined. The *matière de Bretagne*, of course, presents another problem. There are references to an early Welsh nobleman, Bledri ap Cadivor (c.1070–1140, also cited as Breri or Bleheri) who recounted the Tristan story in the 1130s at Poitiers,² but there was no Arthurian literature or *matière de Bretagne* until Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, purportedly given to him as a vernacular text by Archdeacon Walter of Oxford, stirred the imaginations of French writers. With the expanded version of Wace this narrative enters the vernacular world with notable additions either invented by Wace or supposedly drawn from oral sources. Indeed within the next three decades, Chrétien's monographic romances add entire narratives,

¹ In the *Chanson des Saisnes* at the end of the 12th century, Jean Bodel divided the *roman* into these three types.

² See Pierre Gallais, "Bleheri, la cour de Poitiers et la diffusion des récits arthuriens sur le continent," *Actes du VIIe Congrès national de littérature comparée* (Paris, 1967), pp. 47–79.

allegedly concerning knights of the Arthurian world, but whose existence and stories we know mostly from Chrétien's *romans*. Both Wace and Chrétien can make reference to oral storytellers, but we do not know from where they come. Do these authors refer to oral narratives because they existed, or do they make such references to lend authenticity to their *romans*? And if there were no oral narratives, do we imagine that Chrétien invented these tales, an authorial maneuver uncharacteristic of the medieval esthetic and of the writers of the period?

Chrétien's contemporary, Marie de France, composed her *Lais* in the second half of the 12th century, 12 short narratives in octosyllabic couplets ranging in length from just over 100 to something just under 1200 lines. Marie's constant reference to Breton storytellers in her brief prologues and epilogues makes it clear that she either thought her narratives were Breton in origin or that she wished to give the appearance that they were. We, of course, do not know that she really heard these tales sung or narrated by Breton storytellers or whether the Bretons had such a wonderful reputation as storytellers that this was a way to enhance these tales in the eyes of her readers.³

It is a commonplace in Marie de France studies and in those of Old French romance to say that this *matière* derives from Irish and Celtic origin. The idea is not so strange in that Marie de France herself claims in the vast majority of the *lais*, either in her brief introductions or in her conclusions, that she heard the story from Breton storytellers. It is not uncommon to find such references in early romance. In Marie's case, because some settings are on the Continent (*Bretagne la Menor*) and some in Great Britain and because it is believed that she was a French native living in England, it has been contested how and where this literature really became popular among Frenchmen. Did they encounter it in England and Wales after the Conquest of William, or did continental Breton storytellers provide the impetus? The linguistic remains of the Celtic language are no real help in that it is said that the

³ The question of language and transmission of such tales is still unresolved. If transmitted on the Continent, were they told by bilingual natives? If transmitted in England, why would such Breton (presumably Welsh) natives have learned Norman French so quickly? One might imagine some bilingualism among the English, but Norman settlers comprised a small percentage of the population.

differences between continental *Breton* and insular Welsh were slight at that time.⁴

The ready acceptance that Marie's *lais* derive from Celtic folklore derives in large part from the fact that Marie herself affirmed that she heard them from Breton storytellers, but also because so many of the proper names and place settings have names of Breton derivation.⁵ In *Guigemar* the hero's name, often written Guiomar or Guiemar, is clearly derived from the Breton Wihomarch, a name shared by several 11th- and 12th-century viscounts of Liun (Saint-Pol-de-Léon) in Brittany.⁶ In Marie's *lai*, Hoilas is the king in Brittany (spelled Odels in one manuscript), probably the Hoël found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* and Wace's *Brut*, where he is Arthur's faithful nephew and king of *Bretagne la Menor*.

Lanval is a *lai* long considered Celtic in origin. It is the same story as the anonymous Breton *lai Graellent*, though its setting in Arthur's court differs from that of *Graelent*, early considered the more primitive of the *lais*. Constance Bullock-Davies argued that the Arthurian setting is both authentic and appropriate.⁷ She writes that the name of the Celtic god Lanovalus is preserved in this tale. He was worshipped, as was Lug, in the vicinity of Carlisle and modern Burgh-by-Sands, the Roman *Avalana* or *Aballava* (Avalon).⁸

Yonec is another of Marie's *lais* whose setting in the area of Caerwent and Caerlioni in South Wales and whose names Muldumarec and Yonec immediately set it apart as a *lai* of Celtic origin.⁹ Jean-Luc

⁴ Jean-Luc Moreau, "La citez siet sur Duëlas': à propos des *lais* d'*Yonec* et de *Milun*," *Romania* 106 (1985), 492–504. Moreau notes that the names Yonec and Muldumarec are more likely to be Breton than Welsh, but he concedes that there was little difference between the two languages in Marie's time.

⁵ Pierre Jonin, an eminent scholar, believed that one should accept Marie's statements that her sources were *Breton*. See Pierre Jonin, "Le Bâton et la belette ou Marie de France devant la matière celtique," in *Mélanges de langue et littérature française du moyen âge et la Renaissance offerts à Charles Foulon*, II (*Marche Romane* [Mediaevalia 80]) 30 (1980), 157–66.

⁶ Gwénaél Le Duc, "Les *Lais* de Marie de France," in *Regards étonnés de l'expression de l'altérité à la construction de l'identité: mélanges offerts au Professeur Gaël Milin* (Brest, 2003), pp. 299–316. Le Duc affirms that *Guigemar* originated between Saint-Pol-de-Léon and Plougoulm.

⁷ Constance Bullock-Davies, "'Lanval' and 'Avalon,'" *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 23 (1969), 128–42.

⁸ See Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les Fées au Moyen Âge: Morgan et Mélusine, la naissance des fées* (Paris, 1984), especially pp. 250–54 and 222–41 for *Guigemar*.

⁹ For Yonec, Ernst Brugger proposed *Ediunet*, a cognate of the Welsh *eidduned*, meaning "desire." U.T. Holmes proposed a Breton formation from *dihud* through a

Moreau affirms that the names Muldumarec and Yonec are certainly Breton even if they are more likely from *Bretagne la Menor* than Wales, the setting of the *lai*.

Bisclavret and *Laüstic* are both set in *Bretagne*, and both have names derived from Breton. H.W. Bailey explained the name as a joining of *bleid/bleiz* meaning "wolf" and *laveret/lavret* meaning "rational" in the sense that the wolf could speak (*lavar*).¹⁰ William Sayers agrees with Bailey and earlier scholars that *bis* is probably derived from *bleiz* (wolf), but he suggests for *clavret* the Middle Breton *claff*, "sick." Thus *Bisclavret* would refer to a sick wolf, a man beset by lycanthropy.¹¹ Hans Schwerteck added to the suggestion of Sayers in noting that the word *claffret* can also mean "false" in the sense of a falsely made wolf or an imitation wolf, a meaning clearly suitable in the *lai* as well.¹² In *Laüstic*, set at Seint Mallo, Marie explains that *laüstic* means *russignol* in French and *nihtegale* in English, and in *Eliduc* the names of both women, Guilliadun and Guildelüec, seem to be Breton names, especially the name Guildelüec, which all seem to accept. Marie's use of the Breton conjunction *ha* leads one to the conclusion that Marie is following a Breton tale or one derived from a Breton source.

If the names are often Celtic in origin, the setting of the story is nearly always in Brittany or South Wales. Only *Equitan* and *Les Deus Amanz* are not firmly rooted in *Bretagne*, and there is some doubt about *Equitan*. *Guigemar* is set near Saint-Pol-de Léon, *Laüstic* at Seint Mallo, *Le Fresne* at Dol, and *Chaitivel* at Nantes, whereas *Bisclavret* and *Eliduc* are said to have taken place in "Bretagne." *Lanval* is set in King Arthur's court as Carlysle, *Yonec* at Caerwent and Caerlioni, *Milun* in South Wales, and *Chevrefoil* in Cornwall.

Perhaps the strongest case for Marie's *lais* being largely derived from Breton folklore comes from the first *lai* in the book, *Guigemar*, and the prominence of the motif of the Hunt of the White Hind. Many

non-attested *dihudennec*, meaning "one who comforts." Holmes' suggestion is motivated by the textual statement that the future son will comfort his mother. Ernst Brugger, "Eigennamen in den *Lais* der Marie de France," *Zeitschrift für Französische Sprache und Literatur* 49 (1927), 201-52; 381-484; U.T. Holmes, "Old French 'Yonec,'" *Modern Philology* 29 (1931-32), 225-29.

¹⁰ H.W. Bailey, "Bisclavret in Marie de France," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 1 (1981), 95-97.

¹¹ William Sayers, "Bisclavret in Marie de France: a Reply," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 4 (1982), 77-82.

¹² Hans Schwerteck, "Eine neue Etymologie von *Bisclavret*," *Romanische Forschungen* 104 (1992), 160-63.

12th- and 13th-century works in Old French include a version of the hunt in their narrative.¹³ In *Graelent* the hunt leads him to a fairy who becomes his mistress.¹⁴ In *Erec et Enide* the hunt is undertaken at Arthur's command as a very old custom wherein the knight who kills the white stag may designate the most beautiful woman of the court by bestowing a kiss on her.¹⁵ In *Tyolet* and the so-called Wauchier continuation of the *Conte del Graal*, the hero must catch the stag, cut off its foot (*Tyolet*) or head (*Graal*), and present it to the fairy to obtain her favors. In some of the texts in this tradition the mistress is a fairy who has sent the animal to draw the knight to her in the Other-World; in others it is the fairy herself who is transformed into the animal. Rachel Bromwich notes that in Irish mythology the Hunt of the White Stag is closely associated with the theme of the Transformed Hag, a legend which had dynastic implications, "...the symbolical marriage of an Irish king with the deity representing the land itself."¹⁶

If Celtic folklore has drawn much attention in *Guigemar*, it has long been noticed that there are important elements of Marie's *lai* that come from classical sources or a more broadly European folkloric tradition. It should be noted that the motif of the hunt is intimately linked with the motif of the young man who has shown no interest in love (Hippolytus motif from Euripides). Moreover in Marie's *lai* neither the white hind nor the magic boat is the agent of a fairy mistress deliberately drawing the hero to herself. In fact she seems to be an ordinary young woman and her own situation, being locked in a tower, is known among scholars as the widely used *inclusa* motif thought to have originated in the Orient.

¹³ Some works which include the motif are *Dolopathos*, *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*, *Peredur*, *Huth Merlin*, and *Didot Perceval*.

¹⁴ In a thorough study Trond Salberg argues that *Lanval*, *Guigemar*, and *Graelent* are all related to and derive from the Irish tradition of the Debility of the Ultonian Warriors. See Trond K. Salberg, "Le Lien entre la faiblesse des Ulstériens ("A" et "B") et les lais du cycle de Lanval: son importance pour la relation entre les lais et pour le rapport entre deux récits irlandais," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 105 (1989), 445-71.

¹⁵ For consideration of this theme in Celtic tradition, see R.S. Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York, 1949).

¹⁶ Rachel Bromwich, "Celtic Dynastic Themes and the Breton Lays," *Etudes Celtiques* 9 (1960-61), 439-74, see 445; see also Tom P. Cross, "The Celtic Elements in the Lays of *Lanval* and *Graelent*," *Modern Philology* 12 (1914-15), 585-644; and R.N. Illingworth, "Celtic Tradition and the *Lai* of *Guigemar*," *Medium Aevum* 31 (1962), 176-87. See also Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les Fées*, pp. 222-41 on *Guigemar* and 250-54 on *Lanval*.

In more recent years scholars have enlarged the scope of discussion to include a broader sweep of European folklore. Recognizing the immediate links to Celtic folklore in which the fairy magician's presence remains in *Guigemar*, Jelle Koopmans and Paul Verhuyck also relate her to the solar goddess and the androgynous hind to Artemis-Diana. They also recognize in the setting a combination of the classic motifs of the "hortus conclusus" and "locus amoenus."¹⁷

Yolande de Pontfarcy has related *Guigemar* to the concept of sovereignty as discussed by Dumesnil. For de Pontfarcy, *Guigemar* has a cyclical structure in which the hero passes from a world where love is absent to another realm where he finds love. He then returns to his original world where he wins love. In this structure, sovereignty is represented as Guigemar's destiny. In de Pontfarcy's interpretation, Guigemar should have followed the hind and not killed it. Thus he had to be forced toward love and sovereignty, two equivalent ideas. However, the work's folkloric mythology is also thought to have a relevant political meaning for 11th- and 12th-century Brittany.¹⁸

Although the *lai Guigemar* has its immediate source in the Celtic fairy abduction story, Carlo Donà notes that the narrative pattern itself is found as early as the Hittite story of Hilluyankas. One can see many of the themes of *Guigemar* in this story: a deadly hunt, a boat that moves under its own power, etc. Donà says that the hind in *Guigemar* is a metamorphosis of an animal-shaped fairy motif and the self-moving boat is a funeral ship used by the sun to reach its home in the other world. Donà writes that *Guigemar* is formed from an ancient initiation myth which celebrates the voyage of a hero to the land of the dead where he has a love relationship with the queen of the otherworld.¹⁹

Lanval is the only *lai* set in the court of King Arthur. Because the anonymous *lai Graellent* has the same story but not the Arthurian setting, scholars have long considered the setting a literary embellishment provided by Marie. Cesare Segre has shown, however, that *Graelent* is probably a composite borrowing from a number of Marie's works, the

¹⁷ Jelle Koopmans and Paul Verhuyck, "Guigemar et sa dame," *Neophilologus* 68 (1984), 9–21.

¹⁸ Yolande de Pontfarcy, "La Souveraineté du myth au lai de *Guigemar*," *Acta Litteraria* 32 (1990), 153–59.

¹⁹ Carlo Donà, "La cerva divina: Guigemar e il viaggio iniziatico," *Medioevo Romano*, 3rd series, 20 (1996), 321–77; 21 (1997), 3–68.

principal one being *Lanval*.²⁰ This does not mean that Marie did not add the Arthurian setting, only that it might have been part of the *lai* as she heard it.

Long ago, Tom P. Cross pointed out that the basic story of the *lai* followed the folk motif of the "Offended Fée,"²¹ a type of folk tale found in many countries in western Europe and beyond. In the Breton version of this motif, the fairy leaves her land and remains with her lover until he violates her command (the *ges*). As is so often true of Celtic materials, a weakness lies in the recent date of the manuscripts in which these tales are found. Hence one cannot be sure, as in the sources of Chrétien's romances, who influenced whom. The tales cited are generally found in 14th- and 15th-century manuscripts or in the *Book of Leinster*, purported to be of the mid-12th century and to have preserved earlier oral work. This folk motif fits the Mélusine type and is closely woven here with the folk motif known as "Putiphar's Wife" following the biblical narrative. Thus, aside from the "Offended Fée" narrative, scarcely an exclusively Breton tale, the *Lanval* comes to look very much like a 12th-century narrative using well-known stories. After all, what could be more natural to a *lai* from the third quarter of the 12th-century than an Arthurian setting, following the 1155 appearance of Wace's *Brut* and Chrétien's first romances. It seems likely that this setting was a later addition rather than the remains of an oral Breton tradition of which we know nothing. This is especially so in the light of the literary borrowings and the 12th-century trial proceedings, clearly 12th-century features.²²

²⁰ Cesare Segre, "Lanval, Graellent, Guingamor," in *Studi in onore di Angelo Monteverdi*, 2 vols (Modena, 1959), 2:756-70.

²¹ Tom P. Cross, "The Celtic Elements in the Lays of *Lanval* and *Graelent*," *Modern Philology* 12 (1914-15), 585-644.

²² R.N. Illingworth, "La Chronologie des *Lais* de Marie de France," *Romania* 87 (1966), 433-75. Illingworth argued that the trial scene is heavily indebted to the trial of Godwine le Danois, who was accused of a murder he did not commit in Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*. More recently, Philip Bennett has reaffirmed that *Lanval* has textual borrowings from Gaimar's *Estoire* and that Marie used thematic and structural elements as well. Her knowledge of the trial of Godwin, Count of Essex, figured in her resolution of *Lanval*'s judgment. See Philip Bennett, "Marie de France, lectrice de Gaimar? Le cas d'*Equitan*," in *Filologia romanza e cultura medievale: studi in onore di Elio Mellì*, ed. Andrea Fasso, Luciano Formisano, and Mario Mancini, 2 vols (Alexandria, 1998), 1:87-102. E.A. Francis demonstrated that the trial in *Lanval* followed customary legal procedures of the period closely. E.A. Francis, "The Trial in *Lanval*," in *Studies in French Language and Mediaeval Literature* (Manchester, 1939), pp. 115-24.

When one broadens the folkloric search to the larger European or Indo-European field of production, the question of the Breton sources of Marie's *lais* becomes even more questionable. It is true that the stories found in the classical, learned tradition also use folklore motifs or are themselves tales that were drawn from that "vast ocean of stories" that form the repertoire of story-telling motifs used and re-used in all European literary creation. Breton folklore itself, part of the Indo-European tradition, is an area that contributes to and draws from that vast tradition. Thus when tales are made up or taken from somewhere, they are "clothed" regionally in the ambience, customs, language, and geography of their own territory. This we have already observed in the *lais* of Marie de France. But it is also a similar process when one observes the large use of classical sources.

If one concedes that *Chevrefoil* is from the Tristan tradition, itself long thought to have ties to Irish folklore,²³ one is left with a diminishing number of texts that have much more to do with Celtic lore than place names, titles, and the names of characters. *Yonec* is often thought of as one of the *lais* to have come from the Celtic tradition. Cross early isolated three Celtic motifs: 1) the supernatural lover as a bird found in *Togail Bruidna Da Derga*, an Irish tale found in a 15th-century manuscript but thought to be earlier in oral form; 2) a fairy lover makes a woman his mistress. Before his departure he predicts that she will have a son; and 3) a woman is carried off to the Other World by a fairy lover.²⁴ But in this tale, the *inclusa* motif plays a major role, and no Celtic tale has been found joining the motif of the bird lover to it. Thus one must suppose, as R.N. Illingworth did, that someone later, Marie or a *conteur*, must have put the story together.

However, M.B. Ogle rejected the necessity of Irish provenance altogether. He noted that all the motifs in *Yonec* were available to Marie in classical literature.²⁵ Pietro Toldo cited two stories he considered of

²³ However, there has been much doubt cast on this score by those who see narrative ties to Greek mythology and point to the classical heritage of the Irish clergy who shaped the intellectual tradition in Ireland. See Sigmund Eisner, *The Tristan Legend. A Study in Sources* (Evanston, IL, 1969).

²⁴ Tom P. Cross, "The Celtic Origin of the Lay of *Yonec*," *Revue Celtique* 31 (1910), 413-71; see also R.N. Illingworth, "Celtic Tradition and the 'Lai' of 'Yonec,'" *Etudes Celtiques* 9 (1960-61), 501-20; and Silvio Avalle D'Arco, "Fra mito e fiaba: l'ospite misterioso," *Travaux de Linguistique et de Littérature* 16 (1978), 33-44.

²⁵ M.B. Ogle, "Some Theories of Irish Literary Influence and the Lay of *Yonec*," *Romanic Review* 10 (1919), 123-48.

particularly close resemblance: an Indian story called *The Fan Prince* and a Russian tale, *The Resplendent Falcon*. Of the two tales it is the Russian one that is really close to Marie, closer in its features than any other cited analogue.²⁶

In the other eight *lais* of Marie there is precious little to tie her work to Celtic folklore once the names of characters and the geographical settings are excepted. In fact, study of these *lais* reveals Marie's knowledge of classical literature and of both the Latin and vernacular literature of the 12th century. No source has been cited for *Equitan* other than Stefan Hofer's suggestion of an analogue in Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, where there is a striking parallel to Marie's narrative.²⁷ In *Chaitivel* the *De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus has been offered and for *Laüstic* close ties are demonstrated for Ovid. *Les Deus Amanz* is a story related to the establishment of the Prieuré des Deux Amants, which received its name from an ecclesiastical legend told in Chapter 42 of Book I of Gregory of Tours' *Historia Francorum*.²⁸

If one looks at the *Lais* to see how much they reflect contemporary social practice or geography, one finds interesting references to suggest that Marie or her alleged storyteller had updated the narratives to reflect Marie's own particular time. Her knowledge of the geographical route used to travel from Great Britain to Normandy in the 12th century²⁹ and her acquaintance with the physical settings of tales in Normandy (*Les Deus Amanz*) and Wales (*Milun*) provide a contemporary itinerary and backdrop to her *lais*. Her picture of chivalric society portrays feudal conditions and attitudes of the 11th and 12th century, not some imagined, remote past or vestiges from an earlier oral tale. As Glyn S. Burgess notes, Marie was aware that the tourney was not a common event in England during the period of Henry II.³⁰ She thus has Milun go to the Continent at Mont-Saint-Michel for his tourney. She also notes that there were few Englishmen at the tourney. If the question of swan-breeding and hunting regulations in *Milun* reflects

²⁶ Pietro Toldo, "Yonec," *Romanische Forschungen* 16 (1904), 609–29.

²⁷ Stefan Hofer, "Zur Beurteilung des Lais der Marie de France," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 66 (1950), 409–21.

²⁸ Peter R. Grillo, "Folklore et hagiographie dans le lai des Deux Amants," *Romance Philology* 45 (1991–92), 469–83.

²⁹ See Ernest Hoepffner, "La Géographie et l'histoire dans les lais de Marie de France," *Romania* 56 (1930), 1–32; Glyn S. Burgess, *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Context* (Athens, GA, 1987).

³⁰ Burgess, p. 27.

contemporary reality³¹ or the exactitude of trial procedure in *Lanval*,³² Marie has the young woman in *Milun* express fear of her harsh familial treatment beyond anything found in the law codes and can only reflect an imagined punishment in a harsher time past. In *Bisclavret* one finds that the ending in which the female babies of Bisclavret's adulterous wife were born *esnasées* [without noses] is perhaps a reflection of a punishment one can find in an old law code for adultery but certainly not from Marie's time.³³ Yet on the question of what constitutes legitimate marriage in *Le Fresne*, a topic of developing interest in Marie's time, one cannot tell whether she is aware of the contemporary interest in this subject or not.³⁴ Thus the *Lais* reflect a small particular element of Celtic origin in folklore, much use of European folk material generally, names and places that reflect Great Britain and *Bretagne la Menor*, even when the *matière* is not particularly Celtic, much contemporary social practice and law, and some reflection of older practices that were part of the original tale or added to give the appearance of a remote time and place.

But there is much in the *Lais* that indicates Marie's learned education and her knowledge of classical antiquity and its literature. That she knew Latin well is attested by her translation of the *Espurgatoire* and from her statement in the "Prologue" to the *Lais* that she had considered translating some text from Latin. Her reference to Priscian, the 6th-century grammarian, is not correct within the context in which he was writing, yet her citation is specific enough to indicate that she may have had close knowledge of the text. She seems to have known Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* and the *Roman d'Eneas*.

Of the classical authors, there is ample evidence that she was well acquainted with the works of Ovid. In *Guigemar* she describes at length a mural painting depicting Venus, the goddess of love, condemning

³¹ See Constance Bullock-Davies, "The Love-Messenger in 'Milun,'" *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 16 (1972), 20-27.

³² See E.A. Francis, "The Trial in *Lanval*."

³³ See Emanuel J. Mickel, "Antiquities in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *In Quest of Marie de France. A Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantal Maréchal (Lewiston, NY, 1993), pp. 123-37.

³⁴ There was debate in the 12th century concerning the question of what constitutes a legal marriage. One cannot be sure that Marie would know the latest church ruling of 1179 which supported consummation as the only validating step in the marriage procedure.

and burning a work of Ovid, undoubtedly the *Remedia Amoris*, which teaches one the means of resisting love. Further Ovidian influence from the *Metamorphoses* has been noted in *Les Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic*. Segre demonstrated more than 40 years ago that both texts reveal direct knowledge of Ovid's *Piramus and Tisbe*. In *Laüstic* he shows that the first 50 lines of the French text were undoubtedly drawn from the Latin.³⁵ Moreover, Robert Cargo's article relating the embroidered message in *Laüstic* to Ovid's *Philomela* is rather striking.³⁶ In 1981 Kristine Brightenback³⁷ pursued the relationship between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and narrative *conjointure* in three of Marie's *lais*, and in 1992 I suggested that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides* provided models of debate for the inner monologues in several of the *lais* of Marie. These debates between reason and love illustrate the logic of reason's analysis and the irrational pull of Amor's attraction. The text of the debate, built on the antithetical nature and language of the love impulse, presents logical arguments that are swept away by an opposing language of illogic. One can find models of rhetorical debate in numerous monologues (such as *Equitan* and *Les Deus Amanz*) in Old French romance.³⁸ In 1998 SunHee Kim Gertz suggested a connection between the subject of beauty and its relation to love as developed by Plato in the *Phaedrus* and Ovid's tale of Narcissus and Echo in the *Metamorphoses* and Marie's *Guigemar*.³⁹

If Marie's narratives are drawn from a folkloric, oral tradition, some of her most telling moments in these tales, aspects which give them their drama and set them apart, can be found in Ovid or in the broader classical European tradition. Certainly one of the most memorable moments in *Guigemar* occurs when the white doe has been fatally wounded by Guigemar the hunter, who has as yet shown no interest in that other kind of hunting. This white doe, tied so closely to Celtic lore, speaks to Guigemar in the form of a curse or a foreboding

³⁵ Cesare Segre, "Piramo e Tisbe nei Lai di Maria di Francia," *Studi in onore de Vittorio Lugli e Diego Valeri*, 2 vols (Venice, 1961), 2:845–53.

³⁶ Robert T. Cargo, "Marie de France's 'Le Laüstic' and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Comparative Literature* 18 (1966), 162–66.

³⁷ Kristine Brightenback, "The *Metamorphoses* and Narrative *Conjointure* in 'Deus amanz,' 'Yonec,' and 'Le Laustic,'" *Romanic Review* 72.1 (1981), 1–12.

³⁸ Emanuel J. Mickel, "The Language of Illogic," in *Medieval Studies in Honor of Douglas Kelly*, ed. Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy (Madison, WI, 1992), pp. 325–42.

³⁹ SunHee Kim Gertz, "Echoes and Reflections of Enigmatic Beauty in Ovid and Marie de France," *Speculum* 73 (1998), 372–96; see also her *Echoes and Reflections: Memory and Memorials in Ovid and Marie de France* (Amsterdam, 2003).

“destinée.” In Book VIII of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Theseus is returning to Athens but accepts the hospitality of the river god, Achelous, where he is entertained by mythical tales. One of the tales concerned the impious Erysichthon, a man who scorned the gods and dared enter a sacred grove with his axe to fell a great oak tree. As he strikes the tree blow after blow, a voice is heard from within:

nympha sub hoc ego sum Cereri gratissima ligno,
 quae tibi factorum poenas instare tuorum
 vaticinor moriens, nostri solacia leti. (771–73)⁴⁰

In Book XIV Ovid includes the widespread motif of the vengefulness of the woman scorned in Circe’s violent reaction when rejected by Picus, who had fallen in love with the nymph Canens. And there is the story of King Pelops and his love for Hippodamia, a princess who had caused the death of many young men. As it happened, Hippodamia’s father did not wish to see his daughter marry, so he required all suitors to race against him for his daughter’s hand. If the suitor lost, he had to forfeit his life. Wishing Pelops to succeed, Hippodamia bribed her father’s charioteer, who sabotaged her father’s chariot, giving Pelops the victory. In Marie’s *Les Deus Amanz* the young girl helps her lover overcome the father by sending him to her aunt in Salerno for a potion that will allow him to accomplish the task the father had set. Moreover, the text lets us know that she deliberately wore only a single garment so that she might lighten his load.

A more unusual feature is found in Marie’s *Eliduc* when the wife, Guildelüec, finds her husband’s beloved Guilliadun in the chapel unconscious. When her valet strikes a “musteile” [weasel], it is revived by “sa cumpaine,” which brings an herb that revives the seemingly dead weasel. In the *Fasti*, Ovid alludes to the story of Glaucus who, as a boy, was drowned in a jar of honey. His distraught father restored him by using an herb which he saw a serpent use for curing a fellow serpent.⁴¹

Perhaps an even more telling motif involves the famous lines in *Chevrefoil* which characterize the love so great that, separate, they must

⁴⁰ “I, a nymph most dear to Ceres, dwell within this wood, and I prophesy with my dying breath, and find my death’s solace in it, that punishment is at hand for what you do.” Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank J. Miller, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 1.8.459.

⁴¹ From Apollodorus, *The Library*, ed. and trans. James G. Frazer, 2 vols (London and New York, 1921), 1:311.

die. This passage is so distinctive that one associates it with Marie's *lai* as if it could only have been written for them:

D'euls deus fu il [tut] autresi
 Cume del chevrefoil esteit
 Ki a la codre se perneit:
 Quant il s'i est laciez e pris
 E tut entur le fust s'est mis,
 Ensemble poënt bien durer;
 Mes ki puis les volt desevrer,
 Li codres muert hastivement
 E li chevrefoil ensement.
 "Bele amie, si est de nus:
 Ne vus sanz mei, ne mei sanz vus!" (vv. 68–78)⁴²

[The two of them resembled the honeysuckle which clings to the hazel branch: when it has wound itself round and attached itself to the hazel, the two can survive together: but if anyone should then attempt to separate them, the hazel quickly dies, as does the honeysuckle. "Sweet love, so it is with us: without me you cannot survive, nor I without you."]

In Book XIV of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the story of Pomona and Vertumnus. Pomona was a Latin wood-nymph more skilled in gardening than anyone. So much did she love to tend her garden that it was her only love.⁴³ Among the many who loved her was Vertumnus, who persevered through disguises and stratagem to gain her attention and love. Through his disguises he often obtained entry and admired her beauty. Once, while disguised as an old woman, he made comment during the autumnal harvest season concerning a shapely elm tree intertwined with a vine full of grapes:

"at si staret," ait, "caelebs sine palmite truncus,
 nil praeter frondes, quare peteretur, haberet;
 haec quoque, quae iuncta est, vitis requiescit in ulmo:
 si non nupta foret, terrae acclinata iaceret" (vv. 663–66)⁴⁴

⁴² Alfred Ewert, ed., *Lais* (Oxford, 1960). All references to the *Lais* are from this edition. All English translations are from *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, 2nd ed. (1986; London, 1999).

⁴³ This is a curious female alternative to the man who loves only hunting and thinks of nothing else.

⁴⁴ "But if that tree stood there unmated to the vine, it would have no value save for its leaves alone; and this vine which clings to and rests safely on the elm, if it were not thus wedded, it would lie languishing, flat upon the ground." Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank J. Miller, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 2.14.347.

Although Vertumnus does not refer to their love, since she has not become his lover, he does refer to the need for a man and woman to be together else each would languish without fruition.

One of the best crafted of Marie's *lais*, *Le Fresne*, uses to great effect the birth of twin sisters in circumstances so humiliating to the mother that she would rather sacrifice one of her own daughters than bear the shame herself. Marie invests the story symbolically in the names of the sisters and in the tokens given to the abandoned daughter, a ring she had received from her husband and a rich blanket. Both gifts are designed to alert the finder of the foundling that this child is no poor waif but the daughter of people of wealth and blood, a sign that she should be treated accordingly and educated appropriately. In the end of Marie's tale it is the mother who abandoned her daughter who recognizes the ring and blanket and intervenes on her long-lost daughter's behalf. Just as her daughter was being displaced by her twin sister, the mother confesses her own guilt and unlocks the secret identity and true quality of birth of her abandoned daughter.

The circumstances of such tokens and their symbolic value in indicating a hidden reality come from the earliest form of romance in ancient Greece. In the first pastoral romance, *Daphnis and Chloe*, of Longus, the reader is introduced to a rural setting occupied by shepherds, goatherds, and swineherds. Lamo finds an abandoned baby being suckled by a goat. The baby is found with a costly purple cloak, a golden brooch, and a dagger with a handle of polished ivory. At first Lamo thinks to take the rich objects for himself, but he is ashamed to see a goat show more generosity than he, a human. He and his wife decide to raise the boy, whom they call Daphnis, as their own. Two years later a neighboring shepherd, Dryas, finds an infant girl abandoned in a solitary cave sacred to the nymphs. She also had tokens with her: a girdle embroidered with gold, a pair of gilded shoes, and ankle bands all of gold. The shepherd and his wife call her Chloe and raise her as their own. The story follows the developing love and vicissitudes encountered by the two children. Neither set of parents wishes to marry their charge to a shepherd or shepherdess because they are aware that the tokens mean that the child should be given a better match. The lord and lady of the area, Dionysophanes and Clearista, arrive for a visit. Because Daphnis is coveted by the homosexual parasite, Gnatho, Lamo determines that he must tell the young man's story. Both Dionysophanes and Clearista recognize the tokens and that Daphnis is the son they had foolishly abandoned. Now Daphnis

is unhappy that his station in life puts Chloe in another class. But her family reveals that she too is a foundling, and her father comes forth to recognize his daughter. Now that Chloe's lineage is revealed, Clearista dresses Chloe appropriately, as Queen Guinevere dresses Enide in *Erec et Enide*. There Enide's beauty is recognized at court despite her old clothes, thus focusing on Enide's true beauty. Here Chloe, once dressed, is recognized as the great aristocratic beauty that Daphnis had already identified in her unadorned state.

In *Le Fresne* the heroine's lineage and nature are obscured by her mother's sin. Her nature does shine forth in the text as Marie stresses how all the household loved her even though she held the status of a concubine. In the end, the nobility of character hidden by her mother's act of selfishness reveals itself in her understanding self effacement and in the gift of her own blanket to her lover on his wedding night. It is this sacrifice that brings about her own recognition. In *Daphnis and Chloe* the tokens again reveal the aristocratic lineage and unlock the secret of the couple's identity. This allows them to fulfill their love and destinies, but there is no element of sin or guilt. Both the parents of Daphnis and the parent of Chloe abandoned their children for no compelling reason, yet no reproach is made against them by the author or by any character in the romance. The hidden revelation brought about by the gods allows the proper destiny to be fulfilled. In *Le Fresne* one can see the same function of the tokens, but the drama of the text goes beyond the restoration of station. At the heart of the drama lies the free will that the daughter and mother both exercise to such devastating effect. In *Daphnis and Chloe* the parents identify the tokens to the delight of everyone without any sense of shame. The tokens in *Le Fresne* not only identify her station but also have meaning in that they represent what the mother so guiltily and selfishly gave away. The moment when the tokens are recognized is as dramatic for the mother as it is for the daughter. The daughter was giving away her blanket and a key to her identity when the mother is confronted by her conscience, a moment when she might lose her own soul or regain her daughter at great cost to her own dignity.

One can see something of the significance of this change in religion and philosophy in Claudian's "Epithalamium," written in A.D. 398 for the young 14-year-old Emperor Honorius on the occasion of his marriage to Maria, daughter of his great general Stilicho. In the opening of the "Epithalamium," Claudian begins with the theme of the love wound and how it had suddenly changed young Honorius:

Hauserat insolitos promissae virginis ignes
 Augustus primoque rudis flagraverat aestu;
 nec novus unde calor nec quid suspiria vellent,
 noverat incipiens et adhuc ignarus amandi.
 non illi venator equus, non spicula curae,
 non iaculum torquere libet; mens omnis aberrat
 in vulnes, quod fixit Amor. (vv. 1–7)⁴⁵

Here Claudian uses the theme of the wound of the God of Love to reveal that the new focus of the young man's thoughts is entirely on love. He no longer has any interest in hunting, horses, and javelins, the pleasures that had previously enthralled him.

Marie uses this same theme in "Guigemar," but it takes on different significance because of the social overtones. In the "Epithalamium," Honorius is only 14, so hunting, riding horses, and exercising his prowess with the javelin are merely endeavors that one might expect to interest a youngster of 14. There is none of the overtone of the Hippolytus story where the young man—probably in his late teens at least—shows his barbarian heritage (his mother was an Amazon) in his exclusive focus on the solitary, manly pleasures of the woods to the exclusion of a more balanced civilized, social interest. In Claudian's "Epithalamium" these are simply the activities that a young man can be expected to have until he is confronted by a wound received from the God of Love changing him from the hunter to the hunted.

Claudian does not tie together the two forms of hunting, but Marie makes such a link to excellent effect. That Guigemar's exclusive interest in hunting and tourneying has gone beyond the norm is expressed by Marie in her report that some accused him—both those who knew him and strangers—of not being interested in women. By introducing the hunt of the white hind, the Celtic motif in which the white hind is a shape-changing fairy mistress, Marie brings the two hunts together in close encounter. In his successful hunt of the hind he receives a wound that can be cured only by love. That is, the love-wound associated with love that can be cured only by the physician love, as Gottfried von Strassburg calls *Blancheflor*, is a wound that must remain until the

⁴⁵ "Unfelt before was the fire the Emperor Honorius had conceived for his promised bride, and he burned, all unexperienced, with passion's first fever, nor knew whence came the heat, what meant the sighs—a tyro and as yet ignorant of love. Hunting, horses, javelins—for none of these he now cares nor yet to fling the spear; Love's wound occupies all his thoughts." Claudian, "Epithalamium," trans. Maurice Platnauer, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA, 1990; London and New York, 1922), 1:243.

lover receives love, as if this wound were the love-arrow itself and needed the balm of love to assuage it.

Marie's "Prologue" to the *Lais* has often been visited by scholars looking to explain Marie's meaning and what it means about how she sees her *lais*. That the author who has knowledge and "eloquence" is obligated to write or that learning lies fallow and does not flower is clear. That the ancients deliberately wrote obscurely for those who would come after them that they might add the "surplus" of their intellect in commentary is also widely agreed.⁴⁶ It is verses 17 to 22 that cause the greatest disagreement:

Li philosophe le saveient
 E par eus memes entendeient,
 Cum plus trespasserunt le tens,
 Plus serreient sutil de sens
 E plus se savreient garder
 De ceo k'i ert, a trespasser. (vv. 17–22)

[Men of learning were aware of this and their experience had taught them that the more time they spent studying texts the more subtle would be their understanding of them and they would be better able to avoid future mistakes.]

The problem is both linguistic and historico-philosophical. What is the subject of the verb "trespasserunt"? Is the third person plural future form correct, or should one consider "le tens" incorrect in the objective case and make it the subject of "trespasserunt"? Is it that the "philosophe" will become subtler of mind the more time will pass? And if this is the meaning, is Marie expressing a progressive sense that men grow wiser with time, or is she thinking of the old idea that Hugh of St Victor repeated, that moderns were but dwarfs on the shoulders of giants (the ancients)? Thus the passage of time would allow men to see events occur and observe the changes brought about in history. This would allow them to add their own commentary to the obscure texts.

⁴⁶ In fact it was understood among writers of her own day, as the historian, Henry of Huntingdon, a generation younger than Marie, makes clear in referring to his own poetry. As Diana Greenaway notes, Henry's poetic metres in the manner of the Latin epigrammatist Martial often compress the Latin into difficult to read form. However, this difficulty was clearly intentional, as Henry wrote that he meant his poems to interrupt the leisure time of his readers. Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum. The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenaway (Oxford, 1996), p. cxi; see A.G. Rigg, "Henry of Huntingdon's Metrical Experiments," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 1 (1991), 60–72.

Or is the future plural of the verb “trespasserunt” correct and is the subject “li philosophe” in an understood subject within the verb ending with “le tens” the object of this normally intransitive verb? In that case, the classical and medieval idea that the more the “philosophe” pass time poring over their books the more they will grow in wisdom and knowledge and the subtler of mind they will become. And as Augustine would say, who extolled the virtue of difficult texts and the pleasure solving them brought, the “philosophe” would not only grow in their ability to make revealing commentary but also would profit morally from the profound study of such works by learning from the contents, the actions, and the decisions made by the personages in the narratives.

The didactic importance of literature (including history, which was a branch of literature) is so ubiquitous and continuous from Greek antiquity to Marie’s own day that there is hardly a writer who does not espouse and express this primary value of literary works, as Marie’s slightly older contemporaries Henry of Huntingdon and Orderic Vitalis both confirm more than once. In his prologue to the *Historia Anglorum*, Henry calls the “studio litterarum” (p. 2), by which he means not only history writing but epic and romance, “dulce laboris lenimen” (p. 2)⁴⁷ and the greatest of pursuits because one can see the virtue of men shine and negative examples play out, provoking men of spirit to do what is good and shun what is evil:

Vbi autem floridius enitescit uirorum fortium magnificentia, prudentium sapientia, iustorum iudicia, temperatorum modestia, quam in rerum contextu gestarum? (p. 2)⁴⁸

Here Henry, whose goal is ever the contemplative life, nevertheless gives favor to Homer or literature over Chrysippus and his moral philosophy:

...Homerus autem uelut speculo eliquans prudentiam Vlixis, fortitudinem Agamemnonis, temperantiam Nestoris, iusticiam Menelai, et contra imprudentiam Aicis, debilitatem Priami, intemperantiam

⁴⁷ “the sweetest relief from suffering” (p. 3).

⁴⁸ “Where does the grandeur of valiant men shine more brightly, or the wisdom of the prudent, or the discretion of the righteous, or the moderation of the temperate, than in the context of history?” (*Historia Anglorum*, p. 3).

Achilles, iniusticiam Paridis, honestum et utile, et his contraria, lucidius, et delectabilius philosophis historiando disseruit. (p. 2)⁴⁹

The clarity of example and the immediacy of seeing men's good and bad conduct as in a mirror becomes more palpable as examples for the reader to follow or avoid:

...non solum spirituales ad bonum accendunt et a malo repellunt, sed etiam seculares ad bona sollicitant et in malis minuunt. (p. 4)⁵⁰

If literature and history bring the past into view as if present and allow judgment of the future,⁵¹ it has an even more important function in distinguishing man from beast:

Habet quidem et preter hec illustres transactorum noticia dotes, quod ipsa maxime distinguat a brutis rationabiles. Bruti namque homines et animalia unde sint nesciunt, genus suum nesciunt, patrie sue casus et gesta nesciunt, immo nec scire uolunt. Quorum homines quidem illos infeliciores iudico, quia quod bestiis ex creatione, hoc illis ex propria contingit inanitione, et quod bestie si uellent non possent, hoc illi nolunt cum possint. (p. 4)⁵²

Men have the capacity to know, to wish to know their "native land," and to live in the intellect; if not they are worse than beasts because they have the capacity and disdain to use it. Men seek the pleasure of studying their origins and their relationship to the cosmos. The contemplative life, always the objective of philosophy, is brought about by virtuous conduct and an aspiration to live virtuously.

⁴⁹ "Homer showed, as clearly as in a mirror, the prudence of Ulysses, the fortitude of Agamemnon, the temperance of Nestor, the justice of Menelaus, and on the other hand, the imprudence of Ajax, the feebleness of Priam, the intemperateness of Achilles, the injustice of Paris, and in his narrative he discussed what is right and proper more clearly and agreeably than the philosophers" (*Historia Anglorum*, p. 3).

⁵⁰ "...not only provoke men of the spirit to what is good and deter them from evil, but even encourage worldly men to good deeds and reduce their wickedness" (*Historia Anglorum*, p. 5).

⁵¹ "Historia igitur preterita quasi presentia uisui representat, future ex preteritis imaginando diiudicat" (*Historia Anglorum*, p. 4).

⁵² "The knowledge of past events has further virtues, especially in that it distinguishes rational creatures from brutes, for brutes, whether men or beast, do not know—nor, indeed, do they wish to know—about their origins, their race and the events and happenings in their native land. Of the two, I consider those brutish men to be the more wretched, because what is natural to beasts comes to brutish men from their own mindlessness, and what beasts would not be capable of, even if they wished to be, such men, even if capable, do not desire" (*Historia Anglorum*, p. 5).

In literature one finds not only the difficult *matière* that provides one with challenge and growth. In addition, one finds examples to follow and to avoid. This understanding of the value of hard work and the lessons found therein fits well with the lines that follow:

Ki de vice se volt defendre
 Estudier deit e entendre
 E grevos'ovre comencier:
 Par [ceo] se puet plus esloignier
 E de grant dolor delivrer. (vv. 23–27)

[Anyone wishing to guard against vice should study intently and undertake a demanding task, whereby one can ward off and rid oneself of great suffering.]

By her prologue Marie sets her work in the great philosophical tradition brought to the Middle Ages by Boethius in the *De consolazione Philosophiae* and Martianus Capella in his *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. In these two widely known works the philosophical tradition of antiquity is preserved in which the contemplative life represents the only way to that state of blessedness (*beatitudo*) that allows the soul and its governing principle, the intellect, to enjoy the eternity of the intelligible world and escape the ever-changing cycle of mortality that is the principle of the physical cosmos. And in the *De nuptiis*, Martianus transmits to the Middle Ages that Greco-Roman tradition which links the nourishment of the intellect through study of the liberal arts to man's philosophical understanding and his ability to transcend the ever-changing reality of his bodily existence. In the first two books of his presentation of the seven liberal arts, Martianus describes the marriage between the god Mercury and Philology. Mercury is presented as eloquence, but in the long Greek tradition this meant that he was the *logos* (the word) to Zeus' (*logos*) thought. It was Mercury, the messenger of Zeus, who brought the god's thought as word to the gods. The *De nuptiis* concerns itself with the suitable marriage for Mercury. After considering the suitability of several possible partners, it is decided that he should marry the brilliant and beautiful Philologia, she whose very name reveals her love of the *logos* in both its meanings of word and thought. What better match for Mercury's eloquence and his sacred role as the messenger of Zeus' thought than to nourish his eloquence with the knowledge brought by the seven liberal arts, that intellectual preparation which allows one to study the physical cosmos in all its scientific wonder and to consider the philosophical

relationship between the number of matter and the oneness of the intelligible reality.

In her approval of Philologia as a potential bride for Mercury, Juno notes that her constant study and intellectual pursuit are just what Mercury needs:

an vero quisquam est, qui Philologiae se asserat pervigilia laborata et lucubrationum perennium nescire pallorem? quae autem noctibus universis caelum, freta Tartarumque discutere ac deorum omnium sedes curiosae indagis perscrutatione transire, quae textum mundi circulo-rumque volumina vel orbiculata parallela vel obliqua, decusata, polos, climata axiumque vertigines cum ipsorum puto siderum multitudinem numerare, nisi haec Philologia, gracilentia quadam affixione consuevit?⁵³

This young woman is so ardent for learning that she “burns the midnight oil” in her curiosity and pursuit of knowledge, constantly probing the secrets of things hidden from view to the ordinary person but revealed to the “philosophes” in their pursuit of the difficult texts.

But another younger contemporary of Marie, Bernard Silvestris, may provide an insight into what Marie was thinking in her prologue. In his *Commentary on the First Six Books of Virgil's "Aeneid"* Bernard discusses the philosophical meaning of Aeneas' sea journey, his stop at Carthage, and his visit to the underworld. In Book VI, preparatory to the descent of Aeneas, Bernard explains the importance of his visit to Hades in philosophical terms. Bernard explains that there are four ways to the underworld: 1) Natural; 2) Virtuous; 3) Sinful; and 4) Artificial. The artificial descent occurs when some necromancer seeks a conference with demons concerning the future, a descent of little philosophical significance. The Natural descent refers to the birth of the soul and its descent into this world (the underworld) where its life in the body is an *épreuve* that determines the soul's fate. The third way, the Sinful, relates to the first in that it describes the conduct of

⁵³ *Martianus Capella*, ed. James Willis (Leipzig, 1983), 1.37. “Is there anyone who claims he does not know the wearisome vigils of Philology, the constant pallor that comes from her studies at night? For who is there who discusses the heavens, the seas, seething Tartarus, for whole nights at a time, and traverses in her careful research the homes of all the gods—who considers the constitution of the world, the girding circles, the parallels, the oblique circles and colures, the poles and climates and rotations, and the multitude of the stars themselves—unless it is this slender girl, Philology, who is devoted to these pursuits.” Translation from *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts. The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, trans. W.H. Stahl with E.L. Burge, 2 vols (New York, 1977), 2:19.

the soul that becomes so enamored of temporal things that it places its whole desire in them for the sake of pleasure alone. This is a descent in which the soul is lost. The second descent, the Virtuous, also applies to the soul. It is, Bernard writes, when the wise man meditates on mundane things to learn what to avoid. It is through the successful *épreuve* of the things of this underworld that the soul is able to abandon the active life of this world for the contemplative life focused by its intellect. The *philosophe* knows well the significance of literature as vicarious and instructive example to help man live the virtuous descent that he may work his way to the contemplative life. In the end this is the significance of the didactic impulse in classical and Christian medieval literature and may well be what Marie's prologue is suggesting. In Marie's *Lais* there are many examples of conduct that one must avoid. Yet one can see in *Le Fresne* the value of repentance and love in a "salvation" that clearly bears a spiritual meaning. And in the last *lai*, *Eliduc*, which might well be named after the women, the focus on love changes the lives of the three principals involved from the concerns of this life to a life of meditation and contemplation.

In considering the *Lais* of Marie de France it is important to take into account the history of scholarship of the French Middle Ages, very much a child of the 19th century. For it became an area of active study among French intellectuals only after the formation of the Bibliothèque Nationale and the cataloguing and assessment of manuscripts formerly in the Bibliothèque du Roi and in private collections throughout France.

The early study of the Middle Ages, much influenced by Romanticism and its fascination with the ancient past of the nation, largely unstudied between the end of antiquity and the Renaissance, probed questions much alive at the time. The anti-Catholic sentiment promoted by the Revolution permeated early French scholarship,⁵⁴ which sought the pagan origins of French culture in the "indigenous" peoples who began to become Christianized in the 5th century and occupied the territories that would become France, England, and Ireland.⁵⁵ In this interest to study the languages, literature, and history of the Celts of Brittany, Wales, and Ireland and the Normans and Franks

⁵⁴ It is still evident today in the continued separation of Christian thought from the classical tradition in much scholarship.

⁵⁵ I mean the Frankish people, not the Gallo-Romans, some of whom were converted already.

who became "French," early scholars tried to sort out the literary and cultural contributions of these regional peoples to the territories that became France in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.

The early giants of French scholarship, steeped in the French classical tradition and in the language, literature, philosophy, and history of ancient Greece and Rome, found the presence of another element in the manuscripts of the 13th and 14th century (in which our 12th-century literature mostly appears) that preserved the medieval heritage. They found there a *merveilleux* and the remains of a literature concerning an "other world" that seemed foreign to the classical literature they knew so well. This 12th century, which became the focal point of the newly created area of study, was also the dawn of the flourishing of literature and history in the Old French vernacular language. The appearance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (1136) and Wace's expansive Old French "version" known as *Brut* (1155) focused attention on the Breton people, the only ethnic group that had no history of its origins by the mid-12th century. It is no accident that Arthurian literature began to flourish in the last half of the 12th century and continued as an ever dominant force in the prose versions of the Arthurian and Tristan narratives in the early 13th century.

From the late 19th century through the 1950s and 60s, much was written about the Celtic origins of the *Lais* and the works of Chrétien de Troyes. In the case of Marie's *Lais*, most of the emphasis was on *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, and *Yonec* (*Chevrefoil* being recognized as a Tristan fragment or short narrative drawn from a Tristan episode), largely because of the fairy-mistress motif, the shape-changing hawk, and the passage through the "hoge" to the "otherworld." By the 1970s and 1980s little more original research into purely Celtic sources was being brought forward. Scholars had become aware of how much the Arthurian material, whatever its folkloric origins, had been rewritten into the 12th-century in terms of its social, philosophical, and even theological contexts. It is not sure whether there was an earlier "Celtic" version or whether the original story is what we have in written form. In the last 20 years little has been done concerning the Celtic sources of Marie's work, while there is a growing amount of scholarship that has pointed to Marie's use of Ovid and other classical sources. In fact, virtually all the discussion of the Celtic context of Marie's *Lais* focuses on *Guigemar* and often points out the larger folkloric context of which the Celtic is seen as a part. If one considers Marie's *Lais* carefully, it is

only in four of the 12 *lais* that one finds narrative material or elements that purport to be from the Celtic tradition. Even in these works the motif finds itself ensconced in other motifs from the classical tradition and in a religious and social context both Christian and drawn from antiquity. It is becoming clear that Marie's work—as the other works attributed to her indicate—is deeply informed by her knowledge of Latin literature and that even the motifs that seem most closely tied to Breton motifs are reshaped into a Christian and classic philosophical context.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WOUND, THE KNOT, AND THE BOOK: MARIE DE FRANCE AND LITERARY TRADITIONS OF LOVE IN THE LAIS

Roberta L. Krueger

All happy families resemble one another; each unhappy family
is unhappy in its own way.

Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

Tolstoy's opening words in *Anna Karenina* might well describe Marie de France's depiction of love in her *Lais*. All of the stories are about love and the suffering it engenders, yet each presents love's travails in a unique configuration. Rather than tell one long story, Marie assembles 12 tales that depict star-crossed lovers who endure love's pains, each in his or her own way. As she conveys not a single conception of love but a range of erotic, familial, social, and spiritual relationships, Marie draws upon and transforms a diversity of literary sources to portray men and women who struggle to fulfill their desires in the face of complex social constraints.

Virtually all scholarship on Marie's *Lais* considers love in some way.¹ From numerous perceptive studies, several key critical notions

¹ General studies of Marie's notion of love include S. Foster Damon, "Marie de France: Psychologist of Courtly Love," *PMLA* 44 (1929), 968–96; Roger Dubuis, "La notion de *druerie* dans les *Lais* de Marie de France," *Le Moyen Age: Revue d'Histoire et de Philologie* 98 (1992), 391–413; and Jean Flori "Amour et société aristocratique: l'exemple des *lais* de Marie de France," *Le Moyen Age: Revue d'Histoire et de Philologie* 98 (1992), 17–34; see also the individual essays in Jean Dufournet, ed., *Amour et merveille: Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1995). For a fundamental study of Marie's *Lais* in the context of her sources, see Ernest Hoepffner, *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1971). Insightful readings of Marie's presentation of love to which this essay is particularly indebted are those of Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 157–206; Simon Gaunt, *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature: Martyrs to Love* (Oxford, 2006); H. Marshall Leicester, "The Voice of the Hind: The Emergence of Feminine Discontent in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, ed. Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Notre Dame, IN, 2005), pp. 132–69; Donald Maddox,

emerge: that Marie portrays love as suffering; that she depicts a good number of *mal mariées*; that women's words often instigate love affairs or dramatic action;² that the author grapples with the social necessity of sexuality, which is often portrayed androgynously;³ that writing, reading, and desire are closely linked in the *Lais*;⁴ that love, like language, is often fatal;⁵ that love, for Marie, should be a reciprocal passion rather than a courtly game;⁶ that love involves forging new identities;⁷ that Marie constructs a view of transgressive love that defies ecclesiastic, feudal, and courtly conventions;⁸ that the *Lais*, in their variety, constitute "une véritable réflexion sur l'amour."⁹ Yet the variety of Marie's collection makes it impossible precisely to "define" love outside of its unique poetic representation. The *Lais* invite us to examine the nature of their lovers' dolorous stories in each individual tale, as we propose to do in this essay. Although each poem deserves far more attention than we can provide here, we hope that our global, comparative approach to Marie's collection will illustrate many of her literary innovations and distinctive insights.

The flowering of vernacular literature in 12th- and 13th-century France and England heralded a profusion of writings about love. Ovid's *Ars amatoria* (*Art of Love*) and his *Remedia Amoris* (*Remedies*

Fictions of Identity in Medieval France (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 24–82; Milena Mikhailova, *Le Présent de Marie* (Paris, 1996); Anne Paupert, "Les femmes et la parole dans les *Lais* de Marie de France," in *Amour et merveille*, ed. Dufournet, pp. 169–87; Rupert T. Pickens, "Marie de France and the Body Poetic," in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville, FL, 1996), pp. 135–71, as well as studies of particular themes and *lais* that will be noted later.

² Paupert, "Les femmes et la parole."

³ Rupert T. Pickens, "The Poetics of Androgyny in the *Lais* of Marie de France: *Yonec*, *Milun*, and *The General Prologue*," in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm Maddox (Rochester, NY, 1994), pp. 211–19.

⁴ Robert Sturges, "Texts and Readers in Marie de France's *Lais*," *Romanic Review* 71 (1980), 244–64.

⁵ R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 83–110.

⁶ Dubuis, "La notion de *druerie*."

⁷ Maddox, *Fictions of Identity*.

⁸ Flori, "Amour et société aristocratique"; see also Sharon Kinoshita, "Two for the Price of One: Courtly Love and Serial Polygamy in the *Lais* of Marie de France," *Arthuriana* 8.2 (1998), 33–55. For a perceptive analysis of how Marie "problematicize(s) male sexuality within the larger thematics of marriage and erotics in a way that sets her apart from most of her contemporaries" (p. 150), see William Burgwinkle's insightful chapter, "Queering the Celtic: Marie de France and the Men Who Don't Marry," in his *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050–1230* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 138–69.

⁹ Laurence Harf-Lancner, trans., *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1990), p. 16.

for Love), with their sharp wit and cynicism, inspired vernacular imitations and influenced amatory rhetoric in courtly fiction,¹⁰ as did the shape-shifting and sexually charged dramas of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹¹ One Ovidian disciple, Andreas Capellanus, in his *Art of Courtly Love*, presented lovers' dialogues and "cases" for debate, allegedly at the court of Marie de Champagne.¹² Translations of classical epics, notably the *Roman d'Eneas*, an idiosyncratic adaptation of Virgil's classic, enhanced the role of women and embellished the plot with Ovidian love casuistry.¹³ Chrétien de Troyes inaugurated a tradition of Arthurian romances that explored the conflict between chivalric duty and passionate love and invited debate about the tensions of gender.¹⁴ The troubadours and Northern French trouvères sang of desire for a lady who was usually unattainable.¹⁵ Tales about the legendary, tragic love between Iseut, wife of King Mark, and Tristan, Mark's nephew, circulated in many forms.¹⁶ Celtic lore depicted fairy lovers with marvelous powers who drew mortals to the other world, as in the anonymous *lais* of *Graelent* and *Guingamour*.¹⁷ A genre flourishing in the 13th century, the *fabliaux*, depicted men and women tripped up by their bodies

¹⁰ See Ovid, *The Loves; The Art of Beauty; The Remedies of Love; and The Art of Love*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington, IN, 1957). Among the many studies of Ovid's medieval influence, see Peter Allen, *The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the "Romance of the Rose"* (Philadelphia, 1992).

¹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington, IN, 1955). Marie, whose knowledge of Latin is evidenced by her translation of *L'Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*, was clearly familiar with the Ovidian mythography. Ovidian tales circulated in the vernacular as early as the 12th century; see *Pyrame et Thisbé. Narcisse. Philomena: trois contes du XII^e siècle français imités d'Ovide*, ed. and trans. Emmanuèle Baumgartner (Paris, 2000).

¹² Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John J. Parry (New York, 1941). Andreas's work is probably posterior to the *Lais*, but it is indicative of the kind of amatory rhetoric that circulated in the courts of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter, Marie de Champagne, in the late 12th century.

¹³ *Le Roman d'Eneas*, ed. Aimé Petit (Paris, 1997), see esp. lines 7952–9280.

¹⁴ For a recent study of Chrétien's romances that includes a bibliography of editions, see Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert, eds., *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge, 2005).

¹⁵ See Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay, *The Troubadours: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1999).

¹⁶ On the evolution of the Tristan legend from early Old French fragments to contemporary culture, see Joan Tasker Grimbert, ed., *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook* (New York, 1995).

¹⁷ See Alexandre Micha, ed. and trans., *Lais féériques des XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1992).

and appetites.¹⁸ By contrast, saints' lives celebrated men and women who renounced carnal pleasures for transcendent spiritual love.¹⁹ As we shall see, Marie draws on all these traditions in her *Lais*, even as she asserts her critical difference from each.

Social realities for aristocratic men and women in 12th-century Northern France and England often dictated that marriages be arranged for political expediency, to ensure the continuity of lineage under a system of primogeniture, rather than for love.²⁰ Noblemen representing powerful domains were expected to marry women of comparable or superior rank and produce heirs. The chastity of maidens was prized as a guarantor of legitimacy and genealogical purity; a young woman's choice of mate required parental sanction. A wife's fidelity in marriage was sacrosanct. Adultery was severely condemned within canon law, and customary law overlooked the crime of passion: a husband who discovered his wife and her lover *in flagrante delicto* was exonerated if he killed them at that moment. Yet even as powerful families sought to forge alliances through the marriage of their children—negotiating engagements well before a son's or a daughter's sexual maturity—the Church preached that marriages be based on mutual consent. Within religious orders, men and women took vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience to God, seeking spiritual solace to offset terrestrial strife. These complex social realities form the backdrop upon which Marie weaves her multi-stranded tales. Evidently well-versed in Latin literature as well as contemporary oral and written traditions, Marie approached her sources from a perspective that was unusual for her time. As one of relatively few authors to identify herself as female, she wrote within a literary culture dominated by men; she observed human nature and social institutions from the perspective of a woman who was both “on the margins” and inside medieval

¹⁸ For a representative selection, see Luciano Rossi and Richard Straub, ed. and trans., *Fabliaux érotiques: textes de jongleurs des XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1992).

¹⁹ The Anglo-Norman lives of St Laurent and St Catherine, roughly contemporaneous with Marie, are translated in Joceyln Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess, *Virgin lives and Holy Deaths: Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo-Norman Women* (London, 1996). *La Vie de Sainte Audree*, attributed to Marie, will be mentioned later.

²⁰ For a classic statement of conflicting attempts by aristocratic families and the clergy to define marriage during this period, see George Duby, *The Knight, The Lady, and the Priest: The Making of Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York, 1983) and *Mâle moyen âge: de l'amour et autres essais* (Paris, 1988). Although Duby's portrayal of historical women has been questioned by some scholars, his analysis remains pertinent for the fictional world of the *Lais*.

domestic culture. We do not know what Marie's life experience may have been—whether she was or had been married, whether she lived in religious orders. But, perhaps reflecting the author's circumstances, the *Lais* convey empathy for those who find themselves as outsiders, for those who face public criticism for accomplishments or perceived differences, and for those who, because they suffer unjust restrictions, transgress certain social norms.

In the General Prologue of London, British Library, Harley 978, which is the only manuscript to contain all 12 *Lais*, Marie provides insights into her poetic approach towards love.²¹ Although the word *love* is neither mentioned nor announced as a theme, Marie implies that the Ancients, and by implication Marie herself, write “assez oscurement” [quite obscurely] (v. 12)—meaning that the matter was difficult to understand or quite literally dark—in a way that requires interpretation by readers who would add their own understanding, “de lur sen le surplus mettre” (v. 16). She also maintains that suffering [“dolor”] may be overcome and vice avoided if one undertakes a great work, “greuose ovre” (vv. 23–27). Finally, Marie establishes herself as something of a maverick who will not simply translate Latin works into the vernacular (as others have done), but will instead write down oral, Breton tales that she will “assemble” in a collection for the king, most likely Henri II Plantagenet (vv. 43–48). By suggesting that she will tackle difficult, dark subject matter in a way that will challenge her readers, that her poetic efforts—and the corresponding engagement of her readers—may overcome sorrow, and that her classical training will be filtered through popular, oral materials, Marie offers a particularly apt introduction to her original collection of love stories. When she asserts in the Prologue to *Guigemar* that men and women who have been praised may be the object of envy and attacked as if “bitten” by dogs (*Guigemar*, vv. 1–18), she implies that she has a personal stake in stories of those who are calumniated and wounded.

²¹ All citations are from Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner (Paris, 1973). Translations into English are my own. I have also consulted Harf-Lancner, *Les Lais de Marie de France*.

I. Guigemar and the malady of love

Guigemar, the initial tale in the Harley manuscript, is a tale of sexual initiation that sets the stage for the stories to follow, establishing the narrator's themes and approaches and opening a set of questions about the characters' private desires and social obligations.²² With remarkable poetic insight and range, Marie draws from multiple social and literary registers. Into a feudal social setting, she incorporates Celtic myth, Ovidian motifs, and themes from the *Metamorphoses*. Her characters engage in love casuistry that echoes the *Roman d'Eneas*; the lovers' pains evoke the mutual suffering of Tristan and Iseut; and the final episodes portray military exploits typical of chivalric romance. *Guigemar* also introduces features that recur in other *lais*: talking animals (also in *Bisclavret* and *Yonec*); the *mal mariée* (as in *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, *Milun*); symbolic objects exchanged or communicated between lovers (in *Laüstic*, *Milun*, *Eliduc*); and, above all, passionate reciprocal love that is transgressive in some way (as in *Equitan*, *Lanval*, *Deus Amanz*, *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, *Milun*, *Chievrefoil*, and *Eliduc*). Marie's initial narrative presents love as a powerful constellation of pressures, urges, and desires apprehended through language and mediated through cultural signs and symbols.

Guigemar is an admirable young Breton knight much beloved by his family and countrymen. When he comes of age, he serves the king valiantly in war, but his natural disinclination for love makes him an outcast. Although Marie does not discuss the problem explicitly here, medieval readers would understand the pressures on such a nobleman to marry and produce an heir. Following his inclination to hunt rather than to search for love, Guigemar strikes an androgynous hind with an arrow that rebounds to wound him in the thigh. The dying hind prophesies that Guigemar can only be cured by a lady who will love and suffer for him as much as he will do for her. The story then recounts how the wounded knight finds the lady who cures him, loses her, and finally fights to win her back. This apparently simple quest unfolds as a series of complex moments in which Marie explores diverse conceptions of love.

²² On the hero's discovery of his sexual and social identity, see Rupert T. Pickens, "Thematic Structure in Marie de France's *Guigemar*," *Romania* 95 (1974), 328–41.

After Guigemar leaves the dying hind, he is conveyed in a marvelous ship to the land where he will discover love. Judging from the overlay of Celtic motifs, Marie seems to have set the stage for an elusive otherworld encounter with a mysterious fairy lady. Yet the realm that Guigemar enters is strikingly over-determined by literary conventions that hail from classical culture. Guigemar meets not a free spirit (as Lanval will) but a married lady locked up in a tower by a jealous husband and guarded by a eunuch, an old priest who has lost his "lower parts." Furthermore, the walls of the lady's chamber are painted with images that call conspicuous attention to Marie's manipulation of her classical sources: the murals depict Venus, goddess of love, demonstrating how men should maintain love and loyally serve her. The most remarkable feature of this *ekphrasis*, or written description of a work of art, is that Venus casts into the fire "le livre Ovide u il enseigne / comment chascuns s'amur estreine" [the book of Ovid where he teaches how each should struggle against love] (vv. 239–40) and excommunicates all those who would follow the book's teachings. The generic shift from the androgynous hind's amorous prophecy to the goddess of love's book-burning could not be more startling. Yet if the hind's words are mysterious, Venus's defiant gesture is equally inscrutable, as many critics have noted.²³ Which book of Ovid does she burn? The *Ars amatoria*, a cynical manual of seduction, or the *Remedia amoris*, which counsels men how to get over women? Who painted or commissioned the murals, the husband or the wife? By depicting Venus casting the unidentified book of a known misogynist author into the fire, Marie cunningly profiles her knowledge of classical love rhetoric and denounces its insidious effects. The close proximity of the scene of the hind, the *ekphrasis* of Venus and Ovid's book, and ensuing disquisitions on love by the characters and the narrator (vv. 379–526) foreshadow the way that Marie will transform literary

²³ Among the many critics who have analyzed this passage, see Herman Braet, "Note sur Marie de France et Ovide: Lai de Guigemar," in *Mélanges de philologie et de littératures romanes offertes à Jeanne Wathelet-Willem*, ed. Jacques de Caluwé (Liège, 1978), pp. 21–25; Logan E. Whalen, "A Medieval Book-Burning: Objet d'art as Narrative Device in the *Lai* of Guigemar," *Neophilologus* 80 (1996), 205–11; Robert Hanning, "The Talking Wounded: Desire, Truth Telling and Pain in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *Desiring Discourse: The Literature of Love, Ovid through Chaucer*, ed. James J. Paxson and Cynthia A. Gravlee (Selinsgrove, PA, 1998), pp. 140–61; and SunHee Kim Gertz, *Echoes and Reflections: Memory and Memorials in Ovid and Marie de France* (Amsterdam, 2003), pp. 78–84.

conventions of love throughout the *Lais*. She fuses the *merveilleux* of oral Breton tales, which celebrate the ineluctable force of physical passion, with the rhetorical savvy of Ovid and his imitators, who attempt to control desire by verbal manipulation to their own ends. Even as she appears to reject the *Ars amatoria* and the *Remedia amoris*, she will exploit Ovidian amatory rhetoric throughout the *lais*, albeit often to denounce its negative effect. Furthermore, the plight of lovers and their symbolic objects from the *Metamorphoses* will infuse her plots, from the self-absorption of Narcissus (echoed here in the love-spurning Guigemar) to the thwarted adolescent love of Piramus and Thisbé or the resistant weaving of Philomena, as we shall see.²⁴

With a high degree of literary self-consciousness, Marie depicts love as a powerful force that is almost always apprehended through cultural symbols or linguistic signs. In a corollary gesture, the narrator often exploits poetic language or engages in word play to heighten or underscore emotional states. For example, when the dying hind speaks, she does so in terms that echo Ovidian and Tristanian suffering (see vv. 106–22), and her prophecy will be quite literally enacted by Guigemar: his physical *plaie* (wound) will become a metaphoric *plaie*, when he falls in love with the lady (see vv. 379–83).²⁵ This engenders a discursive *plait* [discussion] between Guigemar and the lady, who debate the merits of falling in love, both by themselves and with each other, before they consummate their passion (vv. 400–526); the prolonged process of falling in love and word play recalls the courtship of Lavinia and Eneas in the *Roman d'Eneas*.²⁶ Before the lovers separate (for both fear that they will be discovered by the husband), they seal their relationship with love-knots (*plait*, v. 559): the lady ties a knot in Guigemar's *chemise* that only she can untie; he fastens a belt around her waist that may only be opened by him (vv. 557–76).

The final third of the tale shifts to the register of chivalric romance. The lady escapes from her tower in search of Guigemar, but is captured by Meriaduc, who desires her as his own. The *lai* thus moves from Celtic tale where love is bestowed within a marvelous otherworld,

²⁴ Marie's complex debt to Ovid is explored at length by Gertz, *Echoes and Reflections*.

²⁵ For further exploration of this onomastic play, see Charles Mela, "Le Lai de Guigemar: 'selon la lettre et l'écriture,'" *Marche Romane* 30 (1980), 193–202; and Nancy Vine Durling, "The Knot, the Belt, and the Making of Guigemar," *Assays: Critical Approaches to Medieval and Renaissance Texts* 6 (1991), 28–53.

²⁶ See above, note 13.

through the *romans d'antiquité* where love inspires verbal play, to chivalric romance where the woman becomes a prize contested between knights. By deploying Celtic, Ovidian, and chivalric conventions as a backdrop for an engaging love story, Marie suggests that love is always apprehended through such cultural constructions.

The *Lais*'s poignant love scenes are often marked by self-consciousness on the part of the characters or the narrator that invite readers to step back from the narrative. For example, one of the most anticipated moments in *Guigemar* is the reunion of Guigemar and his lady in Meriaduc's domain after a separation of several years. The lady becomes pale at the very sound of Guigemar's name, but when Guigemar sees her, he does not immediately recognize her: "La dame vit et esgarda / E sun semblant e sa maniere; / Un petitet se traist ariere" [He saw the lady and observed her appearance and manner; he stepped back a little] (vv. 770–72). Guigemar thinks he must be fooling himself to imagine that this is his lady, for women look a great deal alike: "Femmes se ressemblent asez" (v. 779). Not even the test of the belt and the knot will convince Guigemar completely of her identity: "Li chevaliers s'esmerveillat; / Bien la conut, mes nequedent / Nel poeit creire fermement" [The knight was amazed; he recognized her, but nonetheless he could not really believe it (that it was her)] (vv. 812–14). Rather than rush into each other's arms after their long separation, the couple must confirm their identities by performing a rite of reciprocity and retelling their stories. As with their initial encounter, their reunion is a carefully orchestrated manipulation of signs which invite readers not simply to observe but also to interpret their affair, adding "le surplus" of their understanding (General Prologue, v. 16).

Guigemar's otherworld adventure ends abruptly in the public "real" world when he kills Meriaduc and destroys his castle, a solution befitting chivalric romance. The story is one of the few where the lovers are happily reunited as a couple in the end (others are *Lanval*, *Fresne*, *Milun*). But, as readers have noted, Guigemar's story leaves several threads untied.²⁷ The jealous husband remains a shadowy, if distant and unmentioned, menace; there is no word of marriage or children for Guigemar and his lady; and finally, there is no account of reunion with Guigemar's loving family from the *lai*'s opening lines. Marie's own discursive knot is both open and closed. Even as Guigemar discovers

²⁷ For example, see the remarks by Maddox, *Fictions of Identity*, p. 31.

his sexual identity and experiences reciprocal love, the story's loose ends point to questions that will be explored in other *lais*.

Not only for its motifs but especially for its narrative strategies, and like the classical painting that features on the lady's wall, *Guigemar* serves as *mise en abyme* of Marie's literary methods in the *Lais*. Marie approaches her sources not only as poetic "materials" but also as cultural frameworks in which her characters come to know each other and through which they must shape their lives. Sexual identity is not only corporeal but also cultural. Set within a specific geopolitical, socio-linguistic and generic context, each of the *lais* depicts love as a *force motrice* that cannot be divorced from the discursive systems and symbolic tokens through which it is experienced. Marie's enmeshed characters resourcefully manipulate verbal discourse and symbolic objects, seeking to shape their lives in ways that often transgress social norms. As she draws in distinctive ways on a rich treasure of literary sources, Marie portrays love as physical suffering, as a complex linguistic and cultural encounter, and as a fiction wrought by her own creative transformation—as wound, knot, and book—throughout the *Lais*.

II. *Smart woman, foolish choice: Equitan and Ovidian seduction*

If adulterous lovers find lasting "joie" in *Guigemar*, their passion leads to self-destruction in *Equitan*, a brief *lai* that turns the conventions of reciprocal love and fairy-tale endings upside down. Although *Equitan* predates the 13th-century's proliferation of *fabliaux*—short comic tales that often depict adulterers who selfishly pursue their pleasures with single-minded purpose—Marie's tale turns on the plot of the "trompeur trompé" [the trickster tricked or trapped by his own game] favored by that genre. The aphorisms that punctuate the tale link it to the tradition of moral exempla or fable in which Marie later excels. The tale begins in an idealizing mode whose praise of Equitan will soon become ironic: Marie extols the "prowess, courtesy, and nobility" (vv. 1–5) of the Bretons and announces that she will tell the story of a courtly king and ruler, Equitan. Like Guigemar, the hero is much loved by his countrymen. But unlike Guigemar, Equitan is overly fond of amorous activities; his knighthood is merely a pretext for his pleasure (vv. 15–16). Foolish, excessive love, the narrator warns, is dangerous (vv. 17–18).

With shrewd economy, *Equitan* recounts a seduction plot that backfires: a king who falls in love with the wife of his faithful seneschal contrives with the lady to kill the valorous husband, but the lovers' indiscretion results in their own painful deaths. At each step, Marie depicts characters caught up in amorous deceptions that go awry. Equitan covets his seneschal's wife on the basis of her reputation as a beauty before he has even seen her. His desire springs from lack of what he should not have; he goes hunting in a calculated move that leads him to the lady's house. The arrow that strikes him is not that of a marvelous hind, but of powerful "Amurs," a figure that evokes the strategic seductions portrayed in Ovid's *Art of Love*. *Equitan* delves headlong into the dangers of such love rhetoric as it explores the unfortunate consequences of a powerful man who convinces a beautiful, married woman to make a foolish choice.

Although Equitan initially realizes he should not compromise his faithful seneschal's wife (less for the trouble it will bring to her than for the pain it will cause her husband), he justifies his seduction by the specious reasoning that she is too beautiful to be unloved (vv. 79–82). Abusing the protection he owes his seneschal, Equitan goes so far as to convince himself that his vassal will not mind sharing the lady, to whom he does not have an exclusive right: "certes, jeo voil a li partir" [Indeed, I want to share her with him!] (v. 88). Manipulating the woman as an object to be shared—literally "parted" or divided—between two men, Equitan contrives to place the wife in the untenable position of Iseut, shared by Mark and Tristan.

Like Guigemar, Equitan is wounded by love (v. 60), and his "dolor" requires the same cure as Guigemar's: the love of the lady. But Marie deploys these images within a remarkably different register. Love's malady is recast as a crude strategy for seduction. Returning early from a hunt with his seneschal, Equitan pretends to be ill and takes to his bed, thereby enabling him to lure the lady in to his chamber so that he may tell her that he is "dying" of love for her (vv. 113–16).

Unlike other adulteresses in the *Lais*, this lady is not a *mal mariée*, entrapped by a jealous husband. Rather, she is overcome by the king's amorous rhetoric. In *Guigemar*, the hero quickly convinces his beloved that courtly banter is unnecessary for true lovers (see *Guigemar*, vv. 501–26). In *Equitan*, by contrast, the amatory debate is drawn out, precisely to emphasize the king's verbal manipulation (vv. 111–80). The wife's protestations that their affair would be unbalanced, shows that she understands exactly what is at stake: Equitan, powerful king,

takes advantage of his subaltern's wife, a lopsided arrangement that distorts the ideal of love between equals: "Amur n'est pruz se n'est egals" [Love is not good unless it is equitable/equally shared] (v. 137). The wife implies that rich men abuse their paramours, since they keep their lovers from others by force (vv. 146–48). But Equitan protests that only "burgeis" and never "fin curteis" seek to profit from love (vv. 150–54). In a parody of courtly obeissance, Equitan vows to play the subservient role: "vus seiez dame e jeo servanz, / vus orguilluse e jeo preianz" [you be the lady and I the servant, you the proud one and I the supplicant] (vv. 175–76). *Equitan* dramatizes not reciprocity in love, but the asymmetry of gender relations, here conspicuously upended. In a falling-in-love scene diametrically opposed to that in *Guigemar*, Marie depicts at length the abuse of seductive discourse: Equitan insisted so much—"tant ad li reis parlé od li / E tant li ad crié merci" [so much did he speak with her and so long did he cry for mercy]—that the wife surrendered—"E el sun cors li otria" [And she gave him herself, her body] (vv. 178–80). Although some critics have noted Marie's lack of sympathy for the adulteress, others have seen her as a victim who has little choice but to accede to the king's demands.²⁸

When the two lovers conspire to do away with the husband by arranging for him to jump into a scalding hot bath, they are caught not because they have plotted against the seneschal (presumably the king could have rationalized that murder as an accident) but because they could not resist indulging in their immoderate and foolish passion: they make love in the seneschal's bed, which is placed before the scalding bath. The seneschal appears unexpectedly, and the king mistakenly leaps into the burning tub "pur sa vileinie covrir" (v. 294, which implies both masking of his crime and covering of his genitals). Immediately understanding the plot hatched against him, the seneschal throws his wife head first into the boiling water, where she also dies. The ideal of reciprocity celebrated in *Guigemar* transmogrifies into a gruesome double death, underscored in a stark couplet: "Issi mururent ambedui / Li reis avant, e ele od lui" [Thus they both died, the king first, and she after him] (vv. 305–06).

²⁸ For the latter view, see Sharon Kinoshita, "Royal Pursuits: Adultery and Kingship in Marie de France's *Equitan*," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 16 (1999), 43–45; and Leicester, "Voice of the Hind," pp. 140–43.

Equitan portrays lovers who are equally and almost simultaneously destroyed by their unbridled passion. Manipulating amatory motifs and discursive conventions similar to those deployed in *Guigemar* to very different effect, Marie here recounts adultery as a tawdry affair. Devoid of marvelous intervention, set resolutely in the “real” world, *Equitan* dramatizes the abuse of royal power and amatory rhetoric in a sordid scenario wherein the two lovers suffer little for each other until their violent end. Self-interest and carnal pleasures trump sacrifice, until both the man and the woman burn in a torment of their making. The two opening *lais* of Harley 978 thus demonstrate how Marie’s characters can either deploy the rhetoric of love and negotiate its cultural signs to their own ends—as do the lovers in *Guigemar*—or be consumed by them, as in *Equitan*.

III. *Arthurian fantasies*: Lanval

In *Lanval*, Marie de France ventures into the world of Arthurian legend, which first inspired courtly fictions at about the time that Marie composed her *Lais*. In many Arthurian romances, such as Chrétien de Troyes’s *Erec et Enide*, *Cligés*, or *Yvain*, a knight sets out from Arthur’s court to accomplish feats of prowess, winning the hand of a beautiful maiden and the reward of a kingdom or territory; these fictions seem to express the erotic and social fantasies of aristocratic youth who competed for limited resources. Other romances, such as Chrétien’s *Lancelot* and *Perceval*, explore the moral challenges of knights as they attempt to exemplify chivalric honor, sometimes succumbing to sexual temptations or failing to pursue the right goal. Marie’s brief foray into Arthurian fiction, which almost certainly predates Chrétien’s account of Lancelot’s adultery with Guinevere, exemplifies the ambivalent capacity of courtly fiction both to reflect erotic fantasies and social desires and to probe the darker forces that subtend courtly society, where competition, sexual humiliation, and treachery threaten to undermine chivalric identity.

The eponymous hero has been forgotten by Arthur, who has distributed gifts of women and land to all his other knights. Sad and pensive, uprooted in a strange land with nowhere to turn, Lanval wanders off to a riverbank, where he encounters a retinue of beautiful ladies and a fairy lady who seems to be the answer to a landless bachelor’s wildest dreams: she says that she has come from afar for him, and when

he swears that he will do everything that is in his power for her, she grants him not only “s’amur et sun cors” [her love and her being] (v. 133) but anything that he may desire, provided that he keep their love a secret.²⁹ As long as their love remains hidden, male fantasy and female erotic desires seem to correspond with perfect reciprocity.

This dream of mutual love is undone by the desire of another woman, Arthur’s wife. Not unlike the fairy lady, the queen also offers her love to Lanval; she rather brazenly assumes that he will be delighted to take what she has to offer. When he rebuffs her—saying that he has no desire for her love and that he has long served the king—she accuses him of having no “talent” [desire] for women and of preferring the company of “vallez” [young men]—a charge that chagrins Lanval and prompts an overly hasty reply: he loves a woman whose simplest servant girl is more beautiful than the queen herself (vv. 219–302). Stung by this humiliating reply, the queen then falsely blames Lanval before the king of having attempted to seduce her, thus forcing the king to try Lanval for treason. Disconsolate because he has revealed the secret about his fairy lady, whom he has thus lost, Lanval reluctantly prepares to undergo a trial in which he must prove that his lady is more beautiful than Guinevere. Even though Lanval has broken his promise, the fairy lady and her lovely attendants appear in a remarkable procession before Arthur’s court that amply proves Lanval’s claims. The fairy lady’s pardon and generosity thus save Lanval from death, restoring his compromised masculinity and chivalric identity to superior status.

With a few swift strokes in *Lanval*, Marie represents the Arthurian world as a hierarchical society driven by competition and exclusion, where love functions as a fantasy linked to beauty and wealth. A marginalized, spurned knight finds a lady who offers him all that he desires; attacked as a homosexual and calumniated as a traitor by a scheming woman, the knight then vindicates his honor and masculinity when his generous lady love displays her beautiful body before admiring men.

As she ventures into Arthurian fiction at its inception and blends it with Celtic marvels, Marie creates a fantasy that hints at troubling

²⁹ On the fairy lover in Marie and other Celtic *lais*, see Laurence Harf, “La Reine ou la fée: l’itinéraire du héros dans les *Lais* de Marie de France,” in *Amour et merveille*, ed. Dufournet, pp. 81–108.

tensions in the “real” feudal world: that courtly society may be sapped by competition and exclusion; that female sexuality may bolster or threaten masculine identity; that heterosexuality may be imposed through shame; that true love may be difficult to sustain amidst such social pressures. As many critics have noted, the perfect, reciprocal love between Lanval and his fairy lady cannot exist in Arthur’s domain. At the end of the *lai*, Lanval departs on horseback with his lady to Avalon, thus escaping the injustice and hypocrisy of the courtly world. With this symbolic gesture, Marie de France takes leave of the domain of Arthurian romance; elsewhere, she explores other fictional terrains.

IV. Ovidian transformations: *Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic*

As we have seen, Marie’s relationship to Ovid’s works is ambivalent and complex. In *Guigemar*, she seems violently to reject his cynicism about love, and in *Equitan*, she portrays the dangers of Ovidian strategies of seduction: both these *lais* cast the *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris* in a critical light. But other *lais* draw positively from the sexually charged dramas and poetics of transformation in the *Metamorphoses*. In *Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic*, Marie recasts themes and motifs from the *Metamorphoses* to portray love as a tragic, but transformative force.³⁰

Both *Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic* are set within carefully delineated geographic and social spaces—not the “other” world but the “real” world—in which an innocent passion is thwarted. As we shall see, as they demonstrate the power of tragic love to create memorials worthy of remembrance,³¹ both *Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic* exemplify the poetic process that Marie announces in the General Prologue, where a “granz bien” blossoms and flowers.

Deus Amanz tells the story of two children who love and die for each other. An over-protective and overly attached regal father, a widower, thwarts the earnest love of a young man for his daughter by

³⁰ On Marie’s transformation of Ovidian motifs in these *lais*, see Kristine Brightenback, “The *Metamorphoses* and Narrative *Conjointure* in ‘*Deus Amanz*,’ ‘*Yonec*,’ and ‘*Le Laüstic*,’” *Romanic Review* 72 (1981), 1–12 and Gertz, *Echoes and Reflections*.

³¹ On the importance of memory and commemorative objects as topic and poetic strategy in Marie, see Logan E. Whalen, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (Washington, DC, 2008).

imposing an impossible task that must be accomplished by anyone who asks for her hand in marriage: she must be carried without respite in her suitor's arms to the top of an imposing mountain that dominates the region. Not wishing to cause grief or to anger the father she loves, the young girl seeks out the help of her aunt in Salerno, who provides a *beivre* [potion] that will give her lover the *vertu* [strength] that he lacks.

But, as the narrator remarks in one of her rare first-person interjections, the potion is of little worth to the youth, since he lacks moderation (which would enable him to profit from the potion by remembering to drink it): "Mes jo creim que poi ne li vaille / Kar n'ot en lui point de mesure" (vv. 188–89). The "joie" the boy feels for the girl causes him to forget the potion (vv. 192–93), despite her repeated urgings. This *lai* is grounded in physical place and in explicitly corporeal struggles: the youth literally carries her body to the summit and expires when his heart leaves his body (v. 215). Having flung and spread ["espaundu"] the potion on the mountain, where it improves ["amendez"] the countryside and causes "meinte bone herbe" to grow, the girl lies down at the boy's side, embracing him and kissing him, touched in her heart by his "dol" [sorrow] until she dies by his side. Mourned by the disconsolate king and his neighbors, the lovers are buried in a marble sarcophagus on top of the mountain, which takes its name "Deus Amanz" from their adventure (vv. 250–51).

In this *lai*, the king's unreasonable love for his daughter, the daughter's obligation to her father, and the young suitor's imprudent "joie" all combine to create an enormous obstacle that no salutary medicine can overcome. The lovers' double death alludes simultaneously to both the tragedy of Tristan and Iseut (for whom a *beivre* has quite different effects) and the double suicide of Pyramus and Thisbé, young people who, as in *Deus Amanz*, brave opposition from their elders to love, and whose blood colors the fruit of the mulberry bush, a fertile symbol of death (as in *Metamorphoses* IV). In Marie's version, "meinte bone herbe" flower on the mountainside as a poignant symbol of life recalling death, echoing the "flurs" of the General Prologue, which spread ["esprendre"] when a "granz biens" is heard. Marie's poetic monument thus encompasses life and death, the buried lovers and the flowers that spring forth as a symbol of their enduring love.

Laüstic enacts another Ovidian transformation, this time fusing it with lyric conventions, blending elements of lovers separated by a wall, as in Pyramus and Thisbé, with the motif of a woman's weaving

to communicate her story, as in the tale of Philomela.³² Two knights live next to each other in St Malo; the valiant unmarried knight has so assiduously sought the love of his married companion's wife that she has fallen in love with him, because of all the good she has heard of him, and also because he lives next door. Communicating through her window over the high wall erected between their domains, lady and lover speak together and throw gifts across the barrier to each other; the lady is closely guarded by her husband whenever he is at home. One summer evening, the lady is drawn to the window by sweetly singing birds expressing "joie;" the bird song becomes a pretext for the lovers to speak together, and they delight in gazing at what they may not possess. As in many troubadour lyrics—a genre in which the nightingale features prominently³³—the lovers' desire remains unfulfilled.

Laüstic, however, casts lyric desire within a narrative frame: the lady leaves her husband's side in bed so often that he asks why she rises and where she goes. When the lady answers that the nightingale's song is so beautiful, delightful, and desirable that she is unable to keep her eyes shut—a response that evokes the deep pleasure of her love—the lord erupts in cynical laughter. Setting nets, traps, and glue on trees throughout the garden, the lord captures the poor bird and carries it triumphantly to the lady's chamber. With cruel sarcasm, he explains that he has trapped the bird so that it will no longer disturb her sleep; when the lady asks to hold the bird, he snaps its neck in his two hands and throws the body against her bosom, which is bloodied. As in *Deus Amanz*, the *lai*'s corporeal gestures are strongly portrayed; the "col" [neck] is snapped and thrown against the "cors" [person/body] (vv. 115–17).

The nightingale's demise means that the lady has no excuse to speak with her lover. Like Philomena, prevented from speaking with her sister when her brother-in-law rapes her and cuts out her tongue, the lady tells her story through textiles: "En une piece de samit / A or brusedé et tut escrit / Ad l'oiselet envelopé" [she wrapped the bird in a piece of silk embroidered with gold and writing everywhere] (vv. 135–37). She wraps the bird embroidered cloth, seemingly with her story written on it, and sends it to her lover. The lady's "escrit" echoes the motif of

³² See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, trans. Humphries, pp. 143–51.

³³ On the nightingale in troubadour lyric, see Wendy Pfeffer, *The Change of Philomel: The Nightingale in Medieval Literature* (New York, 1985); for her analysis of this *lai*, see pp. 164–67.

lovers' writing in many other *lais*, from *Chievrefoil* to *Milun*.³⁴ Here, the writing does not facilitate love but marks its end. When the knight receives the bird, he prepares a reliquary, studded with precious stones, and carries it with him always. No shape-shifting or miraculous germination occurs in *Laüstic*. Rather, the husband's sordid gesture in killing an innocent bird is transformed by the lady's creative act. The nightingale evokes at once passionate, unconsummated love, the jealous ire of the husband, and the lady's resourcefulness and artistry in conveying the bird and its story to her lover. The knight's subsequent creation of a tomb/reliquary/adorned enclosure encapsulates Marie's poetic commemoration even as it images the enclosure of desire within small, intimate spaces that characterizes this *lai*.³⁵

Both *Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic* transform Ovidian imagery to create new poetic symbols that immortalize tragic love. The tomb in *Deus Amanz* is enormous, overshadowing the entire town, symbolizing a perverse love that has obstructed the generation of a noble line. By contrast, the bird reliquary in *Laüstic* is small and delicate, evoking the fragility of love. The imposing mountain and the tiny reliquary both enclose dead bodies and convey memories of steadfast love. As does Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, Marie transforms these tombs into enduring symbols. In *Deus Amanz*, the monstrous image of incestuous passion is embellished by the flowers of the children's enduring love. In *Laüstic*, a tribute to troubadour lyric, the bejeweled little bird commemorates and incarnates unfulfilled desire.

V. *Portrait of a marriage*: Bisclavret

Bisclavret, one of three *lais* that focus on marriage (the others being *Fresne* and *Eliduc*), presents a dark portrait of marital incompatibility and an intriguing twist on the conventional courtly love story. The tale begins where many romances end, with the apparently happy marriage of a well-regarded lady and highly prized knight. But the couple fails to live happily ever after, for the lady worries about her

³⁴ See Sturges, "Texts and Readers."

³⁵ On the importance of spatial relationships in this *lai*, see Evelyne Datta, "Le Lai du Laüstic: espace poétique où forme et fond fusionnent," in *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness*, ed. Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 365–71.

husband's frequent prolonged absences. When she discovers the secret of his double nature—he becomes a werewolf three days a week—she plots to destroy him, enlisting a former suitor to steal his clothes so that the beast will wander forever in the wild. Betraying her original vows, the lady marries a man she has never loved.

The *bisclavret* [werewolf], meanwhile, is discovered on a hunt by the king, who shows the beast mercy and adopts him when he demonstrates courtly humility by kissing the king's foot (v. 148). The beast and king live in constant, close companionship; the werewolf sleeps next to the king and accompanies him everywhere. But when the knight who married his wife and the wife herself appear at court on separate occasions, the *bisclavret* becomes enraged, taking the knight in his jaws and biting off the nose of the wife. A wise man senses that the beast must have his reasons for attacking this couple; under duress and in fear, the lady confesses how she betrayed her husband. The werewolf discretely dresses in clothes returned to him and falls asleep, now a man, in the king's bed. The king finds the knight, whom he embraces "a hundred times" and restores to his former position. The wife is banished; bearing the mark of her bestiality, some of her female descendants are born without noses.

This *lai*, like the *bisclavret* himself, is something of an *intrus*—a story remarkable for the ways in which it does *not* conform to our expectations of a love story. Marie disrupts the conventional plot of tales told elsewhere: it is not a tale of tragic or thwarted love, not the typical tale of a *mal mariée* imprisoned by a jealous husband. The married couple exemplifies not mutual desire and courtly reciprocity but sexual fear and animosity, cruelty, and vengeance. In *Bisclavret*, the register of the marvelous conjures fears of savage male sexuality and of women's cruelty in responding to that dark image of masculinity. As it explores the antipathy that may occur in some marriages and heterosexual couplings, this *lai* also portrays in a positive light the homosocial bond at the heart of the feudal court. Marie recounts a "queer love story," in the words of William Burgwinkle.³⁶ After the failure of heterosexual love in marriage, the king befriends a beast who turns into a handsome knight; in the end, there is no discussion of marriage for the king's close male companion. In *Bisclavret*, Marie shows her willingness to explore love in its many dimensions, here

³⁶ See Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and the Law*, pp. 165–69.

considering the possibility of a fundamental sexual incompatibility between an apparently happily married man, an excellent knight, and a fine woman.

VI. *The skeleton in the family closet: Fresne*

Fresne also tells the tale of a dark family secret, in this instance a sexual shame hidden by the wife. The eponymous heroine's mother, wife of a fine Breton nobleman, has calumniated falsely her neighbor who bore twins, by claiming that—according to popular wisdom—the new mother must have slept with two men. Although her husband chastises his gossiping wife for slandering their friends, the rumor sticks, and the new mother and her husband are socially ostracized. A year later, when the lady herself bears twins, she rues that her own words have turned against her. Fearing dishonor and banishment, she prepares to kill one of the baby girls. A sympathetic servant girl convinces the mother that this would be wrong and offers to carry the baby to a church, where she will be found and taken in. Before the mother gives up her child, she wraps her in a beautiful cloth from Constantinople and tucks in a ring: her noble birth will not be forgotten. The child, raised by an abbess as her niece, falls in love with a nobleman, Gurun, who is eventually pressured by his barons to find a suitable wife of proven lineage. The woman selected is none other than *Fresne's* twin sister, Codre (of whose existence *Fresne* is unaware). As she prepares her lover's nuptial chamber after his wedding, *Fresne* replaces the bed's shabby coverlet with her own precious cloth. The mother, who has previously remarked and admired *Fresne's* loving nature, recognizes the cloth and her daughter as her own.

Critics have rightly noted the importance of a network of female supporters and the self-sacrificing love of *Fresne*.³⁷ If the wife's betrayal of her husband led to permanent disfigurement in *Bisclavret*, a mark of shame passed down to successive generations, the mother's verbal abuse in *Fresne* is transformed through a series of generous acts: that of the servant girl who helps to give the child away; the abbess who raises her; and, especially, that of *Fresne* herself. The "joie" that

³⁷ See Michelle Freeman, "The Power of Sisterhood: Marie de France's 'Le Fresne,'" in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens, GA, 1988), pp. 250–64.

describes the reactions of father, daughter, and the knight at the end of this *lai* (vv. 488, 491, and 498) is not the delight of sexual pleasure but, rather, the celebration of a new social cohesion. In a surprising and transgressive twist on feudal practice, the union of Gurun and Codre is dissolved to permit the marriage of Fresne and Gurun; Codre finds a suitable match.³⁸

Located resolutely within a “real” setting devoid of *merveilleux* and emphasizing positive changes in relationships, Marie’s *Le Fresne* departs from the paradigm of Arthurian tales, Tristanian tragedy, or tragic Ovidian transformations, and opens a horizon for the *roman réaliste*, where unmarried women often exhibit considerable resilience and resourcefulness.³⁹

VII. *Desiring heroines and their love children: Yonec and Milun*

Children play out complicated family scripts in two other *lais*, *Yonec* and *Milun*. Both these *lais* draw their ideas of love from a range of other texts and social situations. Rich with intertextual references, their primary source might be seen as Marie’s other *lais*. *Yonec* opens with a poignant description of a *mal mariée*, thus linking it to *Milun* and *Laüstic*, with which it shares a bird motif, and *Guigemar*. The heroine is remarkably outspoken and self-conscious about her imprisonment by her wicked older husband: she wishes that he were dead and longs for an adventure of the sort she has heard about in stories (85–108). The heroine’s desires thus explicitly evoke Marie’s own love stories as inspiration for her adventure and as Marie’s literary source.

The lady’s hopes are fulfilled when a magnificent hawk appears at her window, transforms himself into a handsome knight and, after briefly assuming the lady’s shape to receive communion, remains with her for some time as her lover, engendering the couple’s son, Yonec. Echoing *Laüstic*, the jealous husband conspires to kill the hawk, who travels back to his mysterious homeland to die, pursued by the lady who follows his bloody path. This is a particularly dark, sensual *lai*,

³⁸ See Kinoshita, “Two for the Price of One,” pp. 37–41.

³⁹ *Le Fresne* will inspire Renaut’s *Galeran de Bretagne*, and the protagonist resembles in some respects the heroine of *L’Escoufle*. On the maiden in Marie, see my “Transforming Maidens: Singlewomen’s Stories in Marie de France’s *Lais* and Later Courtly Fictions,” in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 146–91.

evoking the lady's fantasy, the shape-shifting of her hawk lover, and her courageous journey to find him in the Otherworld, where he dies. Marie draws on Christian imagery, on visions of purgatory, on the blood that links her to her lover's suffering and to the child that they will bear.⁴⁰ We cannot do justice to the richness of this *lai*, in which Marie strongly links desire and death. Skirting the possibility of a *Tristan*-like ending, where the lady would expire instantly with her lover, Marie imagines a future generation. The lady bears a son who discovers that Muldumarec is his biological father and who eventually slays the man whom he once considered his progenitor. The *merveilleux* in *Yonec* thus allows us to penetrate a dark otherworld. With its fantastic realization of the lady's wishes, its imaginative shapeshifting, its amalgamation of Christian morality and transgressive desire, and its vindictive killing of the husband, *Yonec* is one of Marie's most profound explorations of the joys and dangers of desire.

In the Prologue to *Milun*, the narrator states that whoever wishes to tell different stories must begin them in different ways and in a manner that is pleasing.⁴¹ Marie thus highlights the relationship of *Milun* to other tales in the collection, implying that there will be similarities as well as explicit differences. As in *Yonec*, one of Marie's literary sources for ideas about love in *Milun* can be said to be her other *lais*: *Milun* recasts elements from *Yonec*, *Guigemar*, *Laüstic* and other tales of *mal mariées* in a tale set resolutely within a "real" world where—perhaps rather surprisingly—benign forces prevail. *Milun* transforms the paradigm of star-crossed lovers who find joy only in death or in the exchange of a sterile object symbolizing absence. Underlining narrative "difference" from the start, Marie revisits and revitalizes images of death, separation, and loss depicted in her other *lais*.

The beautiful, courtly young daughter of a baron hears about an exemplary knight from Wales named Milun and sends him a message beseeching his love. As in *Yonec* and *Lanval*, the lady's desire initiates the union. But *Milun* does not transpire in an otherworld setting. The *lai* focuses on pragmatic concerns in a setting that readers would have recognized as similar to their own world: the lovers

⁴⁰ See Jeanne-Marie Boivin, "Bisclavret et Muldumarec: La part de l'ombre dans les *Lais*," in *Amour et merveille*, ed. Dufournet, pp. 146–68.

⁴¹ See Douglas Kelly, "'Diversement comencier' in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *In Quest of Marie de France, a Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantal A. Maréchal (Lewiston, NY, 1992), pp. 107–22.

meet simply in an orchard next to her room, “delez sa chambre en un vergier” (v. 49), and their encounters are so frequent, that a pregnancy inevitably occurs: “Tant i vint Milun, tant l’ama / Que la dameisele enceinta” (vv. 53–54).

If *Yonec* portrays the mysterious depths of passion in an extraordinary and shape-shifting setting, *Milun* highlights the resourcefulness of ordinary lovers who confront dismaying real-life circumstances and solve problems with human ingenuity. Milun and the lady convey their son to Milun’s sister in Northumberland, outfitting him with a ring (given to the lady by Milun) and a letter that contains a written account of the father’s identity and the mother’s adventure. After the lady’s arranged marriage to another man, Milun tucks a message into the plumage of a messenger swan; the note informs the lady that she has the power to heal Milun or kill him, if only she could find a means (here described as “engin” [a clever means or device]) of writing back (v. 237). Marie emphasizes the lady’s *art* and *engin* in seeking out ink and parchment to write her first letter (vv. 252–54). The lovers correspond by means of this faithful swan, who feeds and fasts at three-day intervals at their behest. In several other *lais*, Marie portrays lovers as readers, writers, or storytellers (*Laüstic*, *Chievrefoil*, *Chaitivel*); as many critics have noted, the *Lais* explore the poetic links between desire and language.⁴²

In no other *lai* does the lovers’ correspondence occur so frequently, so concretely, and over such an extended period of time (20 years!), and in no other *lai* do amorous writing or mutual suffering bear such positive fruit. The couple’s son, who becomes a valiant young knight known as “Sanz Per,” learns about his father from the letter his mother wrote at his birth. When he unhorses his father in a battle where the two are very equally matched, Milun recognizes his son by the ring he wears.

This tale of resourcefulness, patience, and steadfastness in love reaches a remarkably satisfying conclusion. The lady’s husband having died, Milun and his lady are married by their own son, without parental sanction or advice of anyone else (vv. 525–30). The *lai* ends as “diversement” as it began: there is no violent exclusion of the third party (as in *Yonec*), departure to another world (as in *Lanval*), suspended resolution (as in *Guigemar*), or tragic separation (as in *Deus*

⁴² Bloch, *Anonymous Marie de France*, pp. 98–108; Sturges, “Texts and Readers.”

Amanz, *Laüstic*, as implied in *Chievrefoil*), or cruel punishment (as in *Bisclavret* or *Equitan*).

Children are rarely desirable outcomes of illegitimate love affairs and are even less frequently agents of their parents' re-unification; Marie has told a courtly tale "differently" and, it would seem, with great pleasure. She dares to imagine an illicit love that results in a long-term commitment, a sanctioned marriage, and an adult child who brings his parents together. This is the only tale that ends with an express avowal of the narrator's own *delit*: "E jeo, ki l'ai mis en escrit, / Al recunter mut me delit" [And I, who put the story into writing, took much delight in telling it] (vv. 533–34). By announcing explicitly the pleasure she has taken in writing the story, Marie reminds her readers of the General Prologue's declaration that a "greuose ovre"—such as this couple's long separation and faithful correspondence—can deliver one from "grant dolur."

VIII. *Courtly competition, a dangerous game: Chaitivel*

In *Chaitivel*, as in *Lanval*, Marie depicts courtly competition, here with a distinctly morbid twist. She casts this curious love story within a setting that will become a stock feature of courtly romance: the tournament, where knights fight carrying the sleeve or colors of their lady, and where the most valiant knight will end up with the most beautiful woman. This is the sort of match arranged for the choice of marriage partner that Chrétien will portray in *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, where Lancelot fights "at his worst" to please Guinevere and then beats all at her command.⁴³ In that tournament, we recall, Lancelot wins but disappoints all the ladies seeking husbands, since the best knight will marry no one. The tournament ends with the ladies declaring that none of them will marry that year.

In *Chaitivel*, one lady is loved by four knights and, because she cannot choose the best, she attempts to display equal affection for all. Each knight, in turn, vies to prove himself the best, even though he knows he is not alone. Marie's presentation emphasizes chivalric competition: she tells us half a dozen times how hard the knights work, how they

⁴³ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, ed. Mario Roques (Paris, 1965), lines 5339–6006.

“espleitier” [work, endeavor] as hard as they can, how each wants to be first, and how each does the same thing to win her love (vv. 29–70).

The game ends badly, when three knights die in a tournament and a fourth is injured “par mi la quisse” [through his thigh] (v. 123)—an injury that symbolizes the sterility of courtly love as a game. The wound is not the beginning of the story (as was Guigemar’s *plaie*) but the dead end; it leads not to love, but only to a *plait* [discussion] about naming.

The lady decides to compose a *lai* about her sad situation and proposes to call it “The Four Sorrows,” since she has lost all her lovers. But the knight convinces the lady that his own fate is worse: he must endure forever his physical incapacity to love—no “joie” from hugs or kisses—and can do nothing but talk. The eponymous hero and his *lai* thus incarnate the very absence of physical passion, the emotional and corporeal nadir of the *Lais*.

Chaitivel is an anomaly in several respects. It involves no courtship, no evolution of love affair(s), and no talk about love until the final discussion about naming. The obstacle to the lovers’ happiness is not a constraining marriage or over-protective parent but, rather, the game of courtly meritocracy that awards the “best” knight to the most desirable lady. Marie seems to offer the hyperbolic dramatization of a social truth: the fierce competition among knights for scarce resources, either the most attractive parcels of land or the most desirable women, inevitably claims victims. As June Hall McCash has pointed out, both men and women lose out in this deadly courtly game.⁴⁴

Whether we read *Chaitivel* as a critique of chivalric competition or as an allegory of unfulfilled desire, where the only recourse is to write about what one has lost, this *lai* offers little consolation. Its most memorable image is an incurable wound that precludes physical “joie” or a new generation. *Chaitivel* is Marie’s most sterile depiction of love. When Marie says, “Ici finist, nen i ad plus, / plus n’en oi ne plus n’en sai / Ne plus ne vus en cunterai” [Here the tale ends, there is *no more*, I have heard *nothing more*, nor do I know *more*, nor will I tell you *more*; my emphasis] (vv. 238–40), she seems to be acknowledging that the reader—like the lovers—may find themselves wanting more. In *Chaitivel*, there is no *surplus*.

⁴⁴ June Hall McCash, “The Lady in *Chaitivel*: Villainous or Vilified?” *Medieval Perspectives* 14 (1999), 140–51.

IX. *The enigma of desire and death: Chievrefoil*

The imposing weight of the Tristan legend lies behind *Chievrefoil*, which is the shortest *lai* in the collection and the one with the most explicit literary source. The story of Tristan and Iseut circulated in Old French versions by Thomas and Béroul (now extant only in fragments) at roughly the same time that Marie composed the *Lais*. It tells how Tristan, nephew of King Mark, falls hopelessly in love with Mark's intended bride, Iseut, when the two drink a love potion intended for the royal couple. The lovers carry on an adulterous affair for years, experiencing both joyful trysts and painful separations. Tristan's unconsummated marriage to a second Iseut, Iseut aux Blanches Mains, leads to the lovers' tragic death: Tristan's wife, overcome with jealousy, does not tell her husband that his beloved Iseut is on her way to cure him of a hunting wound; he dies in sorrow before his lover can reach him, and Iseut la Blonde expires when she arrives to find Tristan dead. This tale of tragic passion, wherein the lovers are ultimately united only in death, is one of the most influential love stories in Western culture. Its bittersweet strains can be heard in many *lais*, but in none more poignantly or explicitly than *Chievrefoil*.

Marie begins her story *in medias res*, when Tristan has been banished by King Mark, who is angered because of his nephew's love for the queen. After a year's absence, Tristan lives without hope. Set against the backdrop of the lovers' impending tragic death, Marie's records a moment of intense "joie": a tryst in the forest that Tristan has arranged by writing his name and an enigmatic message on a branch of hazelnut that he lays in Iseut's path.

In no other *lai* do the written source, the oral legend, the characters' writing, and Marie's retelling meld so perfectly together. Marie's recasting of the story is less about the kind of relationship that Tristan and Iseut have—their actual words to each other are not recounted, and we do not see what happens during their tryst—than it is about the way that their love and the story about it are inseparable. Living legends, Tristan and Iseut embody the principle of tragic reciprocity, as summed up in the only direct speech act (which is Tristan's message on the stick) in the poem: "Bele amie, si est de nus: / Ne vus sanz mei, ne jeo sanz vus" [Beautiful lover, so it is with us: neither you without me, nor I without you] (vv. 77–78). This couplet elegantly states the ethos of reciprocity that Marie could be said to promote in the *Lais*.

Yet readers familiar with the legend know these poignant words foretell the lovers' reunion after death.

Like *Laüstic* and *Chativel*, the *lai* concludes with a self-reflexive gesture that recounts how Tristan composes a tale to commemorate the joy that he had with the queen and "pur ceo k'il aveit escrit" [the message that he wrote]. Marie portrays Tristan ultimately as a writer who composes a *lai* to ward off "grant dolor" until death will bring him closer to his lady.

The Tristan legend resonates, in different keys, in depictions of tragic love throughout the *Lais* (in *Deus Amanz*, *Laüstic*, and *Yonec*, for example). The notion of passion as dangerous and ultimately fatal was a powerful cultural construction in early vernacular literature, nourished by many classical myths, Celtic tales, and troubadour and trouvère lyrics. In her tribute to Tristan, Marie establishes her distance from this conception of love: *Chievrefoil* is her shortest *lai*, devoid of dialogue between the lovers that might engage us in their drama. Powerful as the fatal passion may be, Marie chooses to explore other scenarios—both tragic and life-altering—in her diversely spun tales.

X. *Eliduc, multiple and final perspectives on love*

Eliduc, the final and longest *lai* in the Harley manuscript, is an *assemblage* of perspectives on love that presents Marie's most complex weaving together of themes and recasting of sources. If *Guigemar* works as an opening up of problems that are suspended so that they may be more fully explored, *Eliduc* recasts earlier themes and moves toward a concluding synthesis, as in the last movement of a symphony. Like each *lai* before it, *Eliduc* depicts a love crisis in a unique configuration: this story tells the tale of an apparently good but childless marriage that sours when the husband, a good knight unfairly banished by his king, falls in love with the beautiful young daughter of his new lord. As she recounts the story of a man who serves two lords and loves two women, Marie draws upon the *Roman d'Eneas*, the *Tristan* legend, Ovidian love casuistry, and animal folk legends, as well as on themes, motifs, and perceptions of earlier *lais*; she concludes within the conventions of hagiography, a genre celebrating love for God. As befits the last tale in the collection, the main characters reflect upon the difficulties in which they find themselves with a remarkable degree of self-consciousness. The capacity of *Eliduc*, Guildeluëc (his wife),

and Guilliadun for moral reflection not only renders their choices and actions more poignant and memorable; it also invites readers to evaluate the nature of love throughout the entire collection.

In telling Eliduc's story, Marie traces the progressive moral decline of a man who means no harm but whose failure to speak the truth and to act decisively eventually produces an untenable situation for all. Wrongfully spurned by his king, Eliduc demonstrates his skill and cunning in outwitting and vanquishing the enemy of his new lord (in the longest presentation of military tactics in the *Lais*, surely inspired by the *romans d'antiquités*), proving that he is a brave, savvy leader. When he falls in love, he is overcome neither by enchantment, as is Guigemar, nor by base desire, as is Equitan. Rather, he is troubled ["en effrei," v. 315] by the beauty and sweet talk of an innocent maiden whom he knows he should not love. After his first encounter with the girl, he states clearly where his loyalties should lie. He repents for having wished that he met the girl earlier (vv. 320–22); he remembers his wife and the "bone fei" and loyal conduct he had promised her (vv. 323–26). Unlike Equitan, who also knows better, Eliduc does not seek out the maiden or attempt to seduce her. Rather, by accepting tokens of her love, he does nothing to prevent her from falling in love with him. Although he wishes to be faithful to his wife, he is unable to rid himself (the verb is "jeter," to throw off) of his love for the beautiful damsel, whom he desires to gaze upon and to embrace. Marie assures us that Eliduc does nothing to dishonor the girl (see vv. 473–74 and 575), but she also shows that he has clearly engaged her affections. Eliduc's words to the maiden fall just short of a declaration of love. He is grateful and happy that she loves *him*:

"Dame," fet il, "grant gré vus sai
De vostre amur, grant joie en ai;
E quant vus tant m'avez preisié,
Durement en dei estre lié." (vv. 519–22)

["Lady," he says, "I am very grateful for your love which brings me great joy; and since you have held me in such esteem, I ought to be very delighted."]

By telling her that he has pledged to remain with her father for one year and that, with her leave, he will stay no longer, he implies that he is in some way beholden to her (vv. 524–29). But when the term expires and his own lord calls him back, Eliduc realizes that he has made a terrible mistake in remaining so long and loving the girl: "Allas, fet il, mal

ai erré! / Trop ai en cest païs esté" (vv. 585–86). As is true of monologues throughout this *lai*, Eliduc's words reveal an acute awareness of his situation (see vv. 585–618): he must protect his wife; he cannot possibly remain here; Christianity prevents him from marrying the girl; everything is out of order: "De tutes parz va malement" (v. 603). Even as wants to do all he can to fulfill the girl's desires (vv. 616–18), Eliduc has allowed himself to get into a situation where he can satisfy neither woman, as this monologue poignantly dramatizes.

When Eliduc returns to Guilliadun's domain, after serving his original lord and reuniting in a perfunctory fashion with his wife, he does so incognito and under cover of darkness, stealthily arranging to carry his lover back with him. Eliduc's passive weakness becomes active deception. In so acting, he betrays the maiden, who has placed her innocent trust in her father, and the woman to whom he is already married. Guilliadun finally learns the truth about Eliduc when an angry sailor blames a storm at sea on the fact that Eliduc is married; she falls into a deep coma. (The aggrieved Eliduc commits murder by throwing the sailor overboard.) Eliduc carries his lover's body to a chapel, where he intends to bury her with great ceremony. Expressing regret that the girl ever met him—for she could have been a queen if she had not loved him—he vows to give up arms, become a monk, and to mourn each day at her tomb (vv. 937–50). He prepares to re-enact his passive remorse for the rest of his life.

If Eliduc wavers in moral uncertainty, Guilliadun cannot help herself from intensely loving a man about whom she realizes she knows nothing. From the start, the love-struck Guilliadun understands that she has embarked on a perilous venture. Perhaps more poignantly than any other character in the *Lais*, Guilliadun explicitly voices her vulnerability: "*Jo sui cheüe en malvés pleit! / Jeo eim le novel soudeier, / Eliduc, le bon chevalier*" [*I've fallen into a bad situation! I love the new mercenary, the good knight Eliduc; my emphasis*] (vv. 338–40). Her *malvés pleit* [bad situation] recalls the painful *plaies* of love that others endure throughout the *lais*.

Guilliadun also understands, with remarkable insight, that love's signs are deceptive. She knows that the fact that Eliduc accepts the ring and belt she offers him does not necessarily mean that he loves her, since there is no knight who would not accept such gifts (vv. 367–73); she would hate to be tricked: "*Mut harreie k'il me gabast*" (v. 374). Nonetheless, conscious as she is of the tokens' unreliability, she conveys the objects to Eliduc and continues to wonder whether he has

received them in recognition of reciprocal love, “pur druërie,” or if he has perhaps betrayed her “Peot cel estre, jeo sui traïe” (vv. 431–32).

Like Dido in the *Roman d'Eneas*,⁴⁵ Guilliadun finds that her heart has been overtaken by a man from another country, about whose social identity and plans she is ignorant:

Lasse! cum est mis quors suspris
 Pur un humme d'autre païs!
 Ne sai s'il est de haute gent,
 Si s'en irat hastivement... (vv. 387–90)

[Alas, how my heart has been surprised by a man from another country;
 I don't know if he is of noble station, if he will leave quickly...]

Her monologues reveal an acute awareness of the risk she takes in loving Eliduc—“Folement ai mise m'entente” [I have placed my love foolishly] (v. 392); her words to Eliduc convey her own sense of her credulousness and vulnerability (vv. 532–36). As much or more than other unmarried young women in the *lais* (among whom we count the *puceles* in *Deus Amanz*, *Milun*, and *Fresne*), Guilliadun understands that she surrenders to a man whose goodness she desperately needs to be true.

The third perspective is that of Guildeluëc, “ki mut est bele, sage e pruz” (v. 710), who is heartsick at and confused by her husband's lack of “joie” when he returns to her. If Guildeluëc might reasonably wonder whether Eliduc has placed his affections elsewhere, she proposes instead to exculpate herself before his people if he suspects wrongdoing on her part (vv. 725–26). Eliduc assures her that he suspects her of nothing, explaining rather that he has made a promise to return to the king, who needs him badly. This scene does not dramatize a wife's jealous questions, as was done in *Bisclavret*. But we know that Guildeluëc, described by Marie as “sage,” is no fool. She sensibly leaves the matter where it is: “A tant le lest la dame ester” (v. 740). Whether or not the couple understands the irony of their exchange, the rift between this long-married husband and wife is evident. Eliduc is in the morally fraught position of deceiving two good, beautiful women.

The final third of the *lai* thus balances three very different perspectives: that of the betrayed maiden; the remorseful, grief-stricken lover; and the wife troubled by her husband's lack of “joie” when she receives

⁴⁵ The parallels between Dido and Guilliadun were first drawn by Hoepffner, *Marie de France*, pp. 98–103.

him with delight. When Guildeluëc, aided by a messenger, discovers Guilliadun in the chapel, she wonders at the “merveille” of the girl’s lovely body, fresh as a new rose, and understands at once why the loss of such a beautiful woman has caused her husband to suffer. She declares that she herself will never again know “joie,” out of love and pity. Guildeluëc’s compassion for her husband and the maiden are markedly different from the jealous rage of Iseut aux Blanches Mains or the anger of Dido. In the single instance of enchantment in this worldly tale, Guildeluëc revives Guilliadun with a magic flower that a weasel has used to save its companion (the *belette*, weasel, significantly being a feminine animal in French). The scene thus mirrors and contrasts with the opening scene in *Guigemar*: the mutual wounding of hind and hunter that presaged suffering in love has been replaced by female *belettes* and a pair of ladies who heal, thus effecting a *mise en abyme* of this *lai*’s spiritual renewal and recalling numerous images of flowering and germination throughout the *Lais*.

In a collection of stories where monologues and dialogues are key, it is significant that the *Lais*’s final conversation takes place between two women who tell each other their stories, each from her own perspective. Guilliadun’s words are angry and accusatory: Eliduc has committed a sin by tricking her; she has been “vileinement descunseillee” (v. 1081) and “trahie” (v. 1083) [basely abandoned and betrayed]. She concludes with a blanket condemnation of men: “Mut est fole ki humme creit!” [Whoever believes a man is extremely foolish (or in more popular parlance, crazy)] (v. 1084).⁴⁶ Although she has emerged physically unscathed from a coma, she has no reason to rejoice in her new-found life; she remains emotionally vulnerable.

Guildeluëc’s verbal response is thus the salve that truly revives Guilliadun by rescuing her from despair. She explains that Eliduc has been joyless and despondent ever since he has returned with Guilliadun, whom he thought dead. Identifying herself truthfully [“veirement”] (v. 1093) as his wife, she expresses her “grant joie” that Guilliadun has returned to life and announces that she will return the girl to her “ami” and will release Eliduc from his obligation to her by taking the veil. Marie portrays Guildeluëc’s words as the balm that permits

⁴⁶ Hoepffner compares this accusation to the narrator’s condemnation of Dido in the *Roman d’Eneas*, “Fous est qui en fame se fie,” which Marie’s female character turns against a man; see Hoepffner, p. 103, n. 1.

Guilliadun to carry on: "Tant l'ad la dame confortee / Qu'ensemble od li l'en ad menee" [She greatly comforted the girl in this way until she brought her back with her] (vv. 1103–04). Performing a "greuose ovre," Guildeluëc's actions prevent further "dolor" for the maiden and her husband. She thus enacts Marie's opening words about creative activity in the General Prologue.

Eliduc ends with an exchange of words between women who articulate two different feminine perspectives on love that run throughout the *Lais*. Guilliadun utters the *Lais*'s most forceful condemnation of amorous discourse, those seductive words used by men to entice women into situations that imperil them. But Marie does not end with this dismissal of male or female desire. Rather, she follows it immediately with Guildeluëc's extraordinarily sympathetic acceptance of her husband's love for a younger woman. This comprehensive, compassionate, yet distanced approach to love mirrors the narrator's perspective throughout the collection. Rather than repudiate the joys and pains of sexual love, Marie contextualizes it within the life cycle of men and women as a *force motrice* of human activity, but as only part of the story.

Many critics have commented on Guildeluëc's admirable generosity, comparable and even superior to that of Fresne, constituting as it does the sacrifice of her own happiness for that of her husband and his beautiful young lover. No one, to my knowledge, has asserted that Marie may view this resolution less a sacrifice than a boon for Guildeluëc, who gets exactly what she wants: "Del tut le *voil* quite clamer / E si *ferai* mun chief veler" [*I want* to release him from all obligations, and *I will* take the veil; my emphasis] (vv. 1101–02). Without belittling her admirable compassion, it is possible to sense the ex-wife's relief that she is no longer bound to a man who has distanced himself from her, lied to her, and has all but repudiated her. Rather than express the suicidal rage of Dido or the murderous jealousy of Iseut, rather than sorrowfully resign herself to repudiation, Guildeluëc undertakes a "greuose ovre," choosing the moral high road. On her own initiative, she requests that Eliduc allow her to leave him and that he give her some of his land for an abbey. Eliduc provides for her as generously as the fairy did for Lanval: "Tute sa volonté fera / E de sa tere li durra" (vv. 1133–34) After numerous examples of other-world enchantment, the *Lais* end with a female fantasy fulfilled in the real world of property rights and monastic endowments. Building a church and subsidiary buildings on the site of the old hermitage, the newly

veiled woman transforms a tomb site into a living religious community that accommodates thirty nuns. Marie draws here not from courtly romance but from hagiography, which offers numerous examples of saints who eschew marriage to dedicate themselves to Christ. *La Vie de Seinte Audrée*, a late 12th-century vernacular life attributed to Marie, tells how Saint Audrey resists the sexual advances of husbands in two arranged marriages before earning the right to live on her own in religious orders.⁴⁷ The *lais*'s final image of desire depicts a woman who determines her own life in a female religious community: "sa vie e sun ordre establi" (v. 1144).

XI. Conclusion

Marie's brilliant *assemblage* of love stories serves as a critical *summa* of discourses about love in 12th-century France. From *Guigemar* to *Eliduc*, Marie recasts amatory conventions and amorous discourse, reworking and weaving together stories of love tokens, sexually symbolic beasts, and love-struck characters drawn from a wide spectrum of literary genres. As she recounts the diversity of ways in which human beings find themselves in love, Marie shows how lovers' stories are uniquely shaped by literary conventions as well as by social norms. If some lovers seem doomed to a tragic end from their first words, others manipulate the signs of love in surprising ways, transforming the social landscape, challenging readers to plumb the depths of their understanding, and charting a new path for later courtly fiction.

⁴⁷ A convincing argument in favor of the attribution of this *Life* to Marie de France is made by June Hall McCash, "La vie seinte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?" *Speculum* 77 (2002), 744–77. For an edition, see June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban, ed. and trans, *The Life of St Audrey: A Text by Marie de France* (Jefferson, NC, and London, 2006).

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERARY AND SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE *LAIS* OF MARIE DE FRANCE

Judith Rice Rothschild

Marie de France, an Anglo-Norman poet of Continental origin, lived and wrote in the late 12th century, presumably for (and perhaps at) the court of Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine.¹ The first known woman author in the French language and one whose personal identity nonetheless still remains anonymous,² she was a prolific and popular writer whose *œuvre* now comprises four works of different genres, all in octosyllabic couplets. The texts definitively ascribed to her are, in chronological order: the *Lais* (whose proposed date of composition varies from the 1160s to before 1189, date of death of Henry II, the supposed dedicatee of the collection); the *Fables* (whose

¹ According to Karen M. Broadhurst, "the royal couple's patronage of the emerging literature in French that blossomed for the first time in the twelfth century" has long been contended in general, with conjectures and assumptions of their patronage becoming established facts over time. Intending to ascertain the truth about Henry's and Eleanor's literary benefactions, she reviews C.H. Haskins's list of Henry II's patronage ("Henry II as Patron of Literature," 1925) and the texts themselves of writers of the reign of Henry II, searching for textual evidence of patronage. In Haskins's inventory, a question mark appears beside Marie de France's name. Broadhurst finds that Haskins doubted that Henry had commissioned a work from Marie. She stresses, moreover, that a dedication does not equate with a commission. Marie's words in the General Prologue "...clearly negate the supposition one might make that this king commissioned the *Lais* from her. She states explicitly that the presentation was her own idea." Even though Eleanor was known for her patronage, Broadhurst asserts, further, that "the supposed connection of Marie to Eleanor has no basis in fact, given that we know almost nothing of Marie's life." See Karen M. Broadhurst, "Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patrons of Literature in French?" *Viator* 27 (1996), 53–84, here 60–62.

² See R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago, 2003), for a thorough presentation of the "identity" of the person behind the name of Marie de France. Bloch lists multiple proposed historical identifications of Marie de France, among them Marie de Champagne, a daughter of Aliénor d'Aquitaine and Louis VII; Marie de Boulogne; Marie de Compiègne; a nun named Marie who wrote a *Vie de sainte Audrée*; Marie the half-sister of Henry II who was Abbess of Shaftesbury; another Marie who was Abbess of Reading; and Marie de Meulan, wife of Hugues Talbot (pp. 2–3).

date “depends to an extent on the identification of the Count William to whom they are dedicated,” with the most recent editor, Charles Brucker, preferring the identification of William de Mandeville and the date of composition between 1189 and 1208);³ and the *Espurgatoire saint Patriz* (whose date of composition is again dependent upon the dedicatee’s identification, thus varying from c. 1190 to between 1208–15).⁴

The literary or textual identity of the author of the fourth work, the hagiographical *La Vie seinte Audrée*, has long been in doubt; even as recently as the early 2000s, a possible author was indicated vaguely by one scholar as “a nun named Marie.”⁵ This work, written in “the late 12th or, at the latest the early 13th century,”⁶ has been recently and indubitably connected to “Marie de France” by the compelling scholarship of June Hall McCash, which has been accepted by scholars worldwide.⁷ Based upon linguistic and stylistic reasons, and intertextualities, McCash convincingly argues for the authorship of all four texts by a woman who names herself “Marie” in each work, and even adds, at one time in the *Fables*, the phrase “Marie ai num, si sui de France” [My name is Marie, I am from France] (Epilogue, v. 4; my translation). It should yet be noted that in not one of her texts “does Marie identify herself as a nun.”⁸ In an even more recent study, furthermore, McCash continues her investigation of the historical identity of Marie, noting

³ See Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. Alfred Ewert (Oxford, 1944), with an Introduction and Bibliography by Glyn S. Burgess (London, 1995), here Burgess’s Introduction, p. viii. All references to the *Lais* in this chapter will be to Burgess’s recent presentation of Ewert’s edition. See also the Introduction in *Marie de France: Les Fables, édition critique accompagnée d’une introduction, d’une traduction, de notes et d’un glossaire*, ed. and trans. Charles Brucker, 2nd ed. (Louvain, 1998; 1991).

⁴ In his Introduction to the *Lais* (p. viii), Burgess explains the range of dates as follows: he mentions two possible identifications of the “H. abbot of Sartis” to whom the monk Henry of Saltrey dedicated his *Tractatus*: Hugh, abbot of Sartis, c. 1173 to 1185/1186, which Burgess believes leads to a possible date around 1190 for the *Espurgatoire*. If, however, the dedicatee were the abbot Henry, the seventh abbot of Sartis, then the date of composition would fall between 1208 and 1215.

⁵ Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, p. 3. Although Bloch’s study was printed in 2003, it was of course prepared much before that date. It is highly plausible he did not know of June Hall McCash’s forthcoming publication of her research on *La Vie seinte Audrée* and the identity of Marie.

⁶ *The Life of Saint Audrey: A Text by Marie de France*, ed. and trans. June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban (Jefferson, NC, 2006), p. 4.

⁷ See June Hall McCash, “*La vie seinte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?*” *Speculum* 77, no. 3 (2002), 744–77.

⁸ *The Life of Saint Audrey*, p. 6.

that no one of her era identified her as a nun.⁹ McCash goes on to add her endorsement of the already-proposed secular figure of Marie de Meulan, daughter of Waleran de Meulan and wife of Hugh Talbot, as the author Marie de France. There is still no closure to the discussion of Marie's historical identity.

Claude Fauchet, a bibliophile and member of the Parlement de Paris, first mentioned the name "Marie" in French literary history during the Renaissance. His two-volume *Recueil de l'origine de la langue et poésie françoise* (Paris, 1581) contains a reference to a "Marie de France" (Book 2, item 84) and to her translation from English to French of *Fables* (*Isopet*). Fauchet states that her name came not from royal origin but that she was "natifve de France" (born in France).¹⁰ A first edition in French of Marie's works appeared in two volumes in the early 19th century when Jean-Baptiste-Bonaventure de Roquefort edited his *Poésies de Marie de France poète anglo-normand du XIII^e siècle, ou recueil de lais, fables et autres productions de cette femme célèbre* (Paris, 1820). The *Lais* exist in five manuscripts.¹¹

The first edition in English of Marie's 12 *Lais*, based upon several earlier editions in German of London, British Library, Harley 978 by Karl Warnke, was produced by Alfred Ewert in 1944, in the series *Blackwell's French Texts* (Oxford). There was not another edition in English of Marie's vernacular narratives until Glyn S. Burgess brought out his updated version of Ewert's edition, a half-century later, in 1995. Prefacing Ewert's edition, which is reprinted in its entirety, is a totally new, and much needed, bibliography in two sections. In a richly detailed introduction, Burgess offers "a survey of the problems relating to Marie herself, to the lay as a genre and to the study of her 12 poems."¹² It should be noted that the beginning of an ongoing renaissance in critical studies of Marie de France's works, with particular

⁹ June Hall McCash, "Was Marie de France a Nun?" *Le Cygne*, n.s. 4 (2006), 7–26.

¹⁰ Mentioned in Burgess, *Lais*, p. v.

¹¹ London, British Library, Harley 978 also contains the General Prologue and the *Fables*. Rupert T. Pickens recently discusses not only the provenance of the manuscript but that the two collections, the *Lais* and the *Fables*, are copied in an identical hand. See "Reading Harley 978: Marie de France in Context," In *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness*, ed. Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 527–42.

¹² Burgess, *Lais*, p. iv.

attention given first to the *répertoire* of the *Lais*, began earlier, in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Turning now to the *Lais* of Harley 978 as printed in Burgess's update of Ewert's edition, the structure of the collection merits close attention. It is a group of stories set within a narrative framework, assembled ("assembler," General Prologue, v. 47) by Marie herself. The General Prologue (so called as to differentiate it from the prologue to *Guigemar*, the first *lai* of the collection) is followed by the 12 narratives, each of which is individually framed by a prologue and an epilogue. The General Prologue frames the ensemble of the *Lais* itself, and lacking its own epilogue, the brief one of *Guildelüec ha Gualadun* (listed in Ewert by its more commonly alternative title, *Eliduc*) may be considered as the epilogue to the entire collection as well. It is significant that the next-to-longest and the longest of Marie's *lais*, *Guigemar* and *Guildelüec ha Gualadun*, respectively, frame the *recueil*.¹³ After the General Prologue, the order of the *Lais* in Harley 978 is as follows: *Guigemar*, *Equitan*, *Le Fresne*, *Bisclavret*, *Lanval*, *Les Deus Amanz*, *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, *Milun*, *Chaitivel*, *Chevrefoil*, and *Eliduc*.¹⁴

The General Prologue (56 vv.) is seen to divide into two almost equal parts.¹⁵ Marie announces that the one to whom God has given knowledge or intelligence (meaning herself, of course) has the duty to share it. Furthermore, good deeds ("granz biens," v. 5) have the power to reproduce themselves like flowers.¹⁶ According to Priscian, the custom

¹³ Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, mentioning the narrative detail of repetition, points out how the repetition of the initial sound "gui" in the names *Guildelüec* and *Gualadun* in the prologue to the last *lai*, *Eliduc*, "echoes" the name of *Guigemar*, the first hero in the *recueil* and, we would suggest, forms another element in the narrative framework. See her *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia, 1993), p. 183.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the *assemblage* of the *Lais* according to an alternating pattern of shorter vs. longer narratives in order to permit public performance, see Florence McCullough, "Length, Recitation and Meaning of the *Lais* of Marie de France," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 25 (1978), 257–68. For a recent evaluation of performance art and analysis of medieval texts, see Evelyn Birge Vitz, Nancy Freeman Regalado, and Marilyn Lawrence, eds., *Performing Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge, 2005).

¹⁵ The General Prologue, and the prologues and epilogues to the individual *lais* as well, have been the object of close critical attention for many years. A very recent commentary is given by Logan E. Whalen, in Chapter 2, "The Prologues and Epilogues," in his study, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (Washington, DC, 2008), pp. 35–60.

¹⁶ The "floral metaphor" in this passage has been noticed on numerous occasions. See Whalen for his discussion of "The Flower of Memory," where he astutely connects

of the Ancients was to write obscurely so that their successors could impart their own interpretation ("gloser la lettre," v. 15) and add their own understanding ("de lur sen le surplus mettre," v. 16).¹⁷ (The implication here is that Marie's own readers too should add their own understanding to her work.) Lastly, to avoid sin and suffering, one must undertake a burdensome work ("grevos' ovre," v. 25).

The narrator next speaks of her own literary venture: not to undertake to translate from Latin to French ("romaunz," v. 30) as so many others have done, for it would not enhance her reputation.¹⁸ Rather, she thinks of the *lais* she has heard, made for remembrance's sake by those who composed them about the *aventures* they had heard. Of many she has heard tell, she has composed poems, often laboring late at night at her work.¹⁹ Then dedicating her collection to her lord, the "noble king" who is "so worthy and courtly," she indicates her great

the terms "fluriz" (v. 6) and "flurs" (v. 8) to the springtime opening so frequently used in medieval Provençal and French lyric poetry and romance (*Poetics of Memory*, pp. 39–41). A different interpretation of the phrase "to spread one's flowers" (General Prologue, v. 8) is presented by Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*: for him, in the General Prologue Marie offers an "original invocation...not to remain silent, but to "spread one's flowers" (p. 97).

¹⁷ For a discussion of Marie's concern with authorship, see Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, pp. 10–11. As for the General Prologue, Françoise Le Saux believes that "Marie's preface to the *Lais* openly advocates scholarly exegesis of written texts, placing her work within a tradition of aggregative authority and interpretation." See her "'Gloser La Lettre': Identity and Power in the Poetry of Marie de France," in *Writers of the Reign of Henry II: Twelve Essays*, ed. Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones (New York, 2006), pp. 205–19, here 210.

¹⁸ Of Marie's choice of literary language, Susan Crane comments appositely: "For women who write in England, ...French is their chosen medium, perhaps...because of the elite status of that vernacular as well as cultural pressures associating women with the vernacular rather than Latin...The *Fables* and the *Lais* are the first secular narratives in French written by a woman, importantly extending the precocity of twelfth-century insular literature. It is plausible that Marie's ground-breaking work was facilitated by the peculiar status of French in post-conquest England: a vernacular appropriate to women in its inferiority to Latin, *French was at the same time the vernacular of elite milieux in contrast to English...*" (emphasis added). See Susan Crane, Chapter 2, "Anglo-Norman Cultures in England, 1066–1460," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 35–52, here 46–47.

¹⁹ Stephen G. Nichols points out that "the reference Marie makes to the nocturnal labors of adding poetic value to her *lais*...became a commonplace in Old French down to François Villon's day..." Nichols discusses the "working late" topos in his "Marie de France's Commonplaces," in *Yale French Studies*, Special Issue, *Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature* (New Haven, CT, 1991), pp. 134–48, here 140.

joy should he be willing to receive her present.²⁰ Marie's allusion to the aural-oral and her written production may form part of the mid-12th-century cultural shift discussed by Georges Duby, a change also noticed by R. Howard Bloch.²¹

In the Harley manuscript the General Prologue is followed seamlessly by the prologue to *Guigemar* in which the author almost immediately identifies herself: "Oëz, seignurs, ke dit Marie, / Ki en sun tens pas ne s'oblie," vv. 3–4 (Hear, my lords, the words of Marie, who, when she has the opportunity, does not squander her talents).²² The success of a man or woman can often create envy and slander (here, the announcement of a recurring theme). The narrator rebukes those who act like a "malveis chien coart felun" ("nasty, cowardly, wicked dog," v. 13) who bites treacherously. Nevertheless, in spite of those who wrongly criticize and slander her, who have a right to speak ill, she does not intend to give up her work. Near the end of this prologue, she speaks of the sources of her vernacular narratives that she will relate briefly: tales she knows are true from which the Bretons composed *lais*.²³ We might add that in the course of reading the *Lais*, one will note Marie does not limit herself to Celtic oral materials alone (the *matière de Bretagne*, as it has come to be known) but, as Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner observes, borrows from "Latin materials either

²⁰ Most scholars judge this king to be Henry II Plantagenet; others say his son, the Young King. Although, as we shall see, the adjectives "pruz" and "curteis" will be stock epithets descriptive of Marie's heroes in the *Lais*, "curteis" here has a charged meaning, given Henry II's reputation for courtliness.

²¹ Georges Duby refers to the significant cultural changes in the mid-12th century, from the priestly culture to the knightly culture, and "a shift from the oral to the written word." See *Women of the Twelfth Century. Vol. Two: Remembering the Dead*, trans. Jean Birrell (Chicago, 1997), p. 25. See too Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, where he describes "not only a process of cultural and linguistic transfer from Breton to Old French, but within Anglo-Norman culture, the transformation of an oral culture into a written one" (p. 98). For a more detailed discussion, see Brian Stock, *Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ, 1983).

²² All English translations are from *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, 2nd ed. (1986; London, 1999).

²³ At times, Marie says she has heard a tale; on one occasion, she refers to a written source (*Guigemar*) and on another, to written and oral sources (*Chevrefoil*). According to Bloch, "in the end, we really cannot say with certainty whether Marie's sources were written or oral" (*Anonymous Marie*, p. 6). For a succinct presentation of "The *Lai* as a Genre," "Sources of Marie's Lays," and "The *Lais* and the Genre of Romance," see Burgess, *Lais*, pp. x–xiii and xxxii–xxxiv.

directly or indirectly through *Eneas* and Wace's *Brut*." Bruckner adds that:

Her [Marie's] use of the *matière de Bretagne* connects her to another written tradition of vernacular romance, to which she may refer later in *Chievrefoil* (v. 6): we cannot read her *Lais* without noticing how often she alludes explicitly or implicitly to the Tristan story, while *Lanval* refers us to Arthurian romance as well.²⁴

It has become almost a commonplace to state that the over-arching theme of the *Lais* is love, primarily *fin'amors*. Yet other kinds of love are also depicted or mentioned: maternal and paternal love in *Milun*; a wrong kind of paternal love that verges on the incestuous in *Les Deus Amanz*; a repressed love that leads a mother to murderous intent in *Le Fresne*; love between blood sisters (*Le Fresne*); sisterly love between two unrelated women in *Guidelüec ha Gualadun* (*Eliduc*); accusations of homosexual love in *Lanval*. A triangulation of main characters is found in each story: the traditional form in courtly literature is that of two men and a woman (the unmarried male lover, the husband, and the wife). There are, however, variations on this pattern of the love triangle: the overly possessive father in *Les Deus Amanz* who may be said to replace the customary husband-figure, his unmarried daughter, and her lover, the young squire; the two unmarried sisters and the lover Gurun in *Le Fresne*; and the two women (one married, one unmarried) and the married husband-lover in *Eliduc*.²⁵ Of singular importance to Marie are the titles of her *Lais*. They vary from the proper names of a protagonist (e.g. *Guigemar*, *Lanval*), to a plant (*Chevrefoil*), a tree (*Le Fresne*), an animal (*Bisclavret*), a bird (*Laüstic*), to multi-lingual titles (*Bisclavret* or *Garwaf*; *Gotelef* or *Chevrefoil*), or optional titles (*Le Chaitivel* or *Les Quatre Deuls*). Bruckner pertinently

²⁴ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 159.

²⁵ According to Nora Cottille-Foley, "Marie subverts the tradition [of the love-triangle] which she inherits... Displacements employed within typical triangles enable Marie to subvert the discourse on women... and to render new triadic configurations. Within these new triads, the conflictual nature of the triangle progressively gives way to a feeling of harmony and love." She further notes that two pairs of *lais* "demonstrate the positive implications of triangular relationships on female characters: *Laüstic* and *Les Deus Amanz*, as well as *Fresne* and *Eliduc*." See her "The Structuring of Feminine Empowerment: Gender and Triangular Relationships in Marie de France," in *Gender Transgressions: Crossing the Normative Barrier in Old French Literature*, ed. Karen J. Taylor (New York, 1998), pp. 153–80, here 156.

remarks that “all the titles of the *Lais* are associated with names for the main characters.”²⁶

Another critical attitude discerns, however, a different major narrative concern in the *Lais* other than love. According to Bloch, envy is “one of the defining themes of the *Lais* and the *Fables*.”²⁷ Sarah Spence takes an ever-stronger position: “Marie’s primary thematic concern is with the role of envy in the court... The second prologue... clarifies this point.”²⁸ She continues: “Marie’s understanding of envy is, judging from the prologue to *Guigemar* alone, that it is the primary sin of the court.”²⁹ She points to three tales in which the male protagonist is victimized by envy and slander: *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, and *Tristan* suffer “the fate of isolation; their appearance causes them to be condemned by speech.” Spence continues her analysis of envy (*invidia*) and its opposite, *caritas*, which she believes is “the answer to envy.” In the *lai* of *Eliduc*, which opens with the eponymous hero being envied, slandered and accused because of his good fortune at court, and, finally, exiled, a major focus will be the development of *caritas* which will finally negate its opposite.³⁰ In discussing envy in court life, Bloch remarks:

The image of literary life at the court of Henry II is one of intense rivalry among courtier poets... This particular nexus of concern with the omnipresence of envy as a psychological and social mechanism, the relative absence of such an obsession among French as opposed to Anglo-Norman

²⁶ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 180.

²⁷ Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, p. 11.

²⁸ Sarah Spence, *Texts and the Self in the Twelfth Century*, (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature) 30 (Cambridge, 1996; first paperback version, 2006), Chapter 5, “Writing in the Vernacular: The *Lais* of Marie de France,” pp. 119–40, here 125.

²⁹ Spence, *Texts and the Self*, p. 127. It has been suggested that Marie herself was the object of envy at the court. Indeed, Bloch even confirms that fact, citing the case of Denis Piramus, “a contemporary lyric poet attached to the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine,” who wrote jealously about her. In the prologue to his *Vie de seint Edmund le rei*, Piramus writes:

E dame Marie autresi,
Ki en rime fist e basti
E compassa les vers de lais
Ke ne sunt pas del tut vrais
Et si en est ele mut loee
E la rime par tut amee,
Kar mult l’aiment, si l’unt mult cher
Cunte, barun et chivaler. (vv. 35–42)

Cited in Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, pp. 12–13 and 323; Denis Piramus, *La Vie de seint Edmund le rei*, ed. Hilding Kjellman (Göteborg, 1935).

³⁰ Spence, *Texts and the Self*, pp. 127–28.

writers, and the fascination with the metaphors of animality lends credence to the claim that Marie lived and worked in and around the court of Henry II, who, after all, moved freely and frequently between the two sides of the Channel.³¹

Among numerous ancillary themes or motifs scattered throughout the *Lais*, one or more of which may become dominant in a particular tale or tales, the following should be pointed out: "The dilemma of choice" is present in *Chaitivel* which is, according to Bloch, "in some deep sense also about names."³² The dilemma of choice also exists in *Les Deus Amanz* as the heroine is forced to choose between her father and her suitor. In fact, Bloch sees these two stories as forming "a natural pair."³³ The problem of selection between two spouses is one Eliduc must confront but which he is unable to resolve. Then, too, there exists the multiplicity or choice of various language names for certain *lais* as indicated in their respective prologues (*Bisclavret*, *Laüstic*, *Chevrefoil*, *Eliduc*). Subtending the entire group of tales, thematically and structurally, is the highly important opposition between *remembrance* and *ubliance*.³⁴ For the close connection between memory and the theme of obscurity in the *Lais*, we would refer to Douglas Kelly's study.³⁵

Other secondary themes become prominent, as Françoise le Saux indicates:

The themes of identity, appearances, abuse of power, and loss of speech take on a special resonance in Marie's *lai* of *Bisclavret*... The extent of the discrepancy between medieval attitudes towards wolves and the positive depiction of *Bisclavret* may also be an invitation to look at the narrative from a different, less-trusting angle, to reveal a level of subversion that goes far beyond a simple inversion of received values regarding werewolves.³⁶

³¹ Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, pp. 157–58.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁴ For a detailed analysis of the various meanings of *remembrance*, see Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, pp. 39–42. See also Whalen, *The Poetics of Memory*, for a penetrating discussion of "Remembrance and Memoire in the Prologues and Epilogues," pp. 51–60. At a later point, Whalen refers to Marie's "constant concern with memory," and "her frequent use of the term 'remembrance'" (p. 106).

³⁵ Douglas Kelly, "Obscurity and Memory: Sources for Invention in Medieval French Literature," in *Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lois Ebin, (Studies in Medieval Culture) 16 (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1984), pp. 33–56.

³⁶ Le Saux, "Gloser la Lettre," pp. 209–10.

For *Bisclavret*, the theme of betrayal is a central issue:³⁷ the husband is betrayed by his indiscretion,³⁸ prompting his wife to devise her treachery which then drives the plot. Betrayal figures prominently too in *Equitan*, *Laüstic*, and *Eliduc*, where Eliduc betrays his wife, his lover, and his king, the king of Exeter. The theme of *le merveilleux* is used sparingly yet the supernatural functions significantly when, according to Burgess, “from time to time,” Marie “needs to bring her two principal protagonists together.”³⁹ This situation occurs in *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, and *Yonec*: “The *merveilleux* is employed when an impasse has been reached in the lives of one of the characters, when something is needed to bring an unhappy character together with someone he or she can love...”⁴⁰ A female character’s unhappiness is, not unexpectedly, caused by the power of the man to whom she is subordinate, whether husband or father; *Guigemar*, *Yonec*, and *Milun* illustrate this situation. A heroine, pictured in an oppressed and stereotypically passive gender role at the beginning of a *récit*, may, through circumstances of the narrative, assume power. The young girl in *Les Deus Amanz* exemplifies just that situation of feminine empowerment, in this case facilitated by her aunt’s complicity and medical expertise. Instances of inherent female power may be seen in the figures of the queen and *la fée* in *Lanval*. For Nora Cottille-Foley, “...the signs of women’s power should be taken seriously in Marie’s *lais*. Feminine power is an area where her writing entertains a tense relationship with the social reality of her time.”⁴¹

A final theme to be considered is one formulated by Joan Brumlik: “the private is, in the long run, almost inevitably made public,” a theme

³⁷ About this theme, Bloch observes that “the *Lais* are laden with betrayal” (*Anonymous Marie*, p. 89). Rupert T. Pickens discusses a number of crimes which Bisclavet’s wife commits: by having his clothing stolen, she deprives him of his humanity; she deprives of his human voice. Moreover, “she appropriates her husband’s words” when “she takes over his speech—his confession of lycanthropy—and turns it to her own advantage.” See his, “Courtly Acculturation in the *Lais* and *Fables* of Marie de France,” in *The Court and Cultural Diversity*, ed. Evelyn Mullally and John Thompson (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 27–36, here 34–35.

³⁸ Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, p. 95.

³⁹ Burgess, *Lais*, pp. xviii and xxix–xxx.

⁴⁰ Burgess, *Lais*, p. xxx. Burgess further remarks that “the three lays in which the *merveilleux* has an important role to play constitute a form of triptych and they may have been composed at about the same time in Marie’s career, perhaps in the order *Lanval*, *Yonec*, *Guigemar*. In each lay there is a good deal of movement...” (p. xxx).

⁴¹ Cottille-Foley, “Female Empowerment,” p. 168.

“only touched upon in *Equitan*,” where the king’s and the seneschal’s wife’s adultery, believed to be well hidden, is suddenly revealed.⁴² A second discovery of an adulterous relationship is that of Guigemar and his lady. This discovery is, incidentally, related in one of the rare humorous passages in the *Lais*: an accumulation of four past participles of perception, discovery, and sight emphasize the acuity of the spy’s vision (*Guigemar*, vv. 577–80). Two final instances where a concealed love is made public, although in very different circumstances, are those of Eliduc and Guilliadun, and Lanval and his fairy mistress. At important points in three other narratives, hidden identity comes to light through the association of objects with characters: the silken cloth and the ring in *Le Fresne*; Guigemar’s lady and the belt; and the cloth and the ring in *Milun*.⁴³

The reader entering for the first time the worlds of Marie’s stories may be overwhelmed by the abundance of themes, motifs, settings, repetitions of various sorts, characters, and situations whose meanings will become more clear through more frequent readings. As we consider the *Lais* as a whole, it may be useful to review preoccupations of scholars of our time vis-à-vis Marie. What are the multiple approaches, perspectives, and methods presented in their discussions, perceptions, and evaluations of the literary aspects of her collection? Of the vast number of critical judgments put forth, we have chosen four statements that together, we believe, both attempt to answer the above questions and judiciously summarize Marie’s literary achievements. One scholar asserts:

The *Lais* of Marie de France are superficially simple and straightforward, but they reveal themselves to be extraordinarily complex narrative texts that respond to a surprising variety of modern critical interests. Marie is deeply concerned with, and her *lais* bountifully exemplify, such matters as specularity, the poetics of narrative, the nature of textuality, and the woman writer...In addition to the mechanics of discourse itself, Marie focuses on the human body, frequently a sexually ambiguous body, as both object and purveyor of fruitful, meaningful discourse. In fact, Marie’s characters and the circumstances in which they engage in

⁴² Joan Brumlik, “Secondary Characters in *Equitan* and *Eliduc*,” in *The Court and Cultural Diversity*, pp. 189–95, here 194.

⁴³ For a highly perceptive discussion of the association between objects and characters, see Nancy Bradley Warren, “Objects, Possession and Identity in the *Lais* of Marie de France,” *Romance Languages Annual* 6 (1994), 189–92.

communicative acts reflect her ideal narrator and that narrator's world of courtly discourse.⁴⁴

A second critic focuses upon both the entirety of the *recueil* and the singularity of each *lai*:

[T]he recurrent elements of characters, situations, plots, and so on, like a set of themes and variations, suggest the general character of human experience, its substitutability, and at the same time highlights, against the common background of human stories, the uniqueness of each *aventure*, its selection of a particular combination of shared features.⁴⁵

Also noticing repetitions of several kinds across the 12 narratives, a third scholar moves on to assess Marie's representation of characters from the perspective of gender:

In her *Lais*... Marie de France assembles twelve stories with criss-crossing motifs and themes whose characters subtly defy traditional social categories, often blurring or transgressing easy distinctions between male and female, human and beast. Although she presents a gallery of remarkable female figures... she complicates the categorical definition of woman's nature as either virtuous or evil, or of man's nature as either naturally protective of or oppressive toward women.⁴⁶

Yet another critic mentions, among other topics, the notable feature of *l'entrelacement* (intertwining) "as both theme and technique" and offers examples, including the intertwined honeysuckle in *Chevrefoil* and the enveloped bird in *Laüstic*:

Marie's use of intertwining extends beyond the specific uses... to the interrelationship of all her tales. Much like the pattern of a troubadour poem, Marie's characters and plots suggest a cat's cradle system in which the same or similar figures show up in different contexts and relationships. While adultery may be sinful in one instance it is not in another; while love from afar makes a mockery of love in one tale it is its purest expression in another; the use of hazel in one *lai* calls up a different

⁴⁴ Rupert T. Pickens, "The Poetics of Androgyny in the *Lais* of Marie de France: *Yonec*, *Milun*, and the General Prologue," in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 211–19, here 211.

⁴⁵ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 198. On the subject of themes and variations see Judith Rice Rothschild, *Narrative Technique in the Lais of Marie de France: Themes and Variations*, vol. I (North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures) 139 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1974).

⁴⁶ Roberta L. Krueger, "Beyond Debate: Gender in Play in Old French Courtly Fiction," in *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees (New York, 2002), pp. 79–95, here 81.

interpretation of the tree than in another. And as with the formal intertwining of the troubadour lyric, the change in context provides a shift in emphasis; what is highlighted is the multifaceted, ever-changing qualities of life of the individual in a changing spatio-temporal frame.⁴⁷

Within the individual prologues and epilogues, the reader/listener is struck by the repetition of certain key words of the narratives, among them: *l'aventure*, *la vérité*, *la remembrance* (and its contrary, *l'ubliance*), *le lai*, and *li Bretun*. From the list above, we would give primacy to the word *aventure*, since it is at the origin of a story. *Aventure*, appearing first in the General Prologue (v. 36), has called forth countless commentaries. For Bloch, "the word *aventure* is one of the richly plurivalent signifiers of the *Lais* and constitutes a liminal key to the whole." He usefully traces the evolving meanings of the word, as follows: first, *aventure* "refers to the material of the tale, that which lies outside of its formal telling, and also carries the unmistakable resonance of orality." A second meaning is the "story of an experience," a "tale of adventure." Third, *aventure* also "relates prospectively to that which will come or happen. It carries the valence of an advent." Lastly, *aventure* "connotes chance, fortune, risk..."⁴⁸

Of almost equal importance to the *Lais* and their structure is the concept of *remembrance*, first appearing in the General Prologue, v. 35, and its opposite, *ubliance*, mentioned a few lines later (General Prologue, v. 40), in the form *oblier*. For Logan E. Whalen:

That Marie is occupied with memory is apparent from her comments in line 35 of the General Prologue, where she asserts that the authors of the *lais* she has heard originally made them to perpetuate the memory of the stories from which they were composed... Likewise, Marie, in her turn, is interested in preserving these stories for posterity...⁴⁹

Whalen notes, moreover, that "the use of terms that relate to memory are so ubiquitous in the *Lais* that Denise McClelland [a contemporary scholar] has referred to 'un vocabulaire mémoriel' in regard to Marie."

⁴⁷ Spence, *Texts and the Self*, p. 124. Within the context of memory, Whalen points out a significant intertextuality within the *recueil* itself (*Poetics of Memory*, pp. 56–57): the phrase "Ke pur remembrance les firent" at the beginning (General Prologue, v. 35) is repeated almost verbatim at the end of the *Lais*: "De l'aventure de ces treis / Li auncien Bretun curteis / Firent le lai pur remembrer, / Qu'um nel deüst pas oblier" (*Eliduc*, vv. 1181–84).

⁴⁸ Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, pp. 26–28.

⁴⁹ Whalen, *Poetics of Memory*, p. 52.

The privileged positions of these terms in the prologues and epilogues serve as a constant reminder to the audience “that the purpose of putting the story into the vernacular is to preserve it in memory.”⁵⁰ Burgess also emphasizes the theme of memory: “Almost an obsession for Marie was her conviction that she was following in the footsteps of the Bretons. Like them, she wanted to ensure that her stories would be remembered for all time.” He continues:

In order to convey the importance of the act of remembering Marie also uses the verb *oblir*. Her entire objective in the *Lais* stems from her desire not to forget the lays she has heard (Prologue, v. 40)...It is worthy of note that the verb *oblir* literally provides the last word in the entire collection.⁵¹

A final term deserving comment is *la vérité*. Just where does the truth of Marie’s stories lie? According to Bruckner, “Marie connects the oral tradition to the notion of truth, while the written tradition entails rather the problems of meaning, obscurity, and interpretation... [T]ruth is something to be associated with the original aventure.” As she further explains:

Within the stories themselves the truth topos appears frequently, invoked either by the narrator or the characters, to affirm the truth of events described or words exchanged... The fictionality of the *Lais* is an important feature, for the medieval public as well as for modern readers. But if for the moment we accept at face value the idea that an adventure truly occurred at a given point in the past, we can begin to appreciate why Marie assumes as much as possible the persona of the oral storyteller.⁵²

Among the recurring characters that Marie as storyteller incorporates within each *lai* are, expectedly, the members of a love triangle; as stated earlier, the traditional members are wife, husband, and lover.⁵³ As was also said before, variations upon this triangulation will occur. Limiting ourselves primarily to moral and psychological portraiture, we begin first with the repeated figure of the *mal mariée* (the unhappily mar-

⁵⁰ Whalen, *Poetics of Memory*, p. 54.

⁵¹ Burgess, *Lais*, p. xvii.

⁵² Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, pp. 191–92. Burgess concurs with Bruckner’s opinion on the association of truth with the original adventure: “She [Marie] often stresses that she is relating something which actually happened and telling the truth about it” (*Lais*, p. xvi).

⁵³ For a thorough examination of triangulation in Marie’s stories, see Donald Maddox, “Triadic Structure in the *Lais* of Marie de France,” *Assays: Critical Approaches to Medieval and Renaissance Texts* 3 (1985), 19–40.

ried wife). This character, who also represents a socio-cultural theme, appears, and always with at least one variation, in at least six tales: *Guigemar*, *Bisclavret*, *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, *Milun*, and *Chevrefoil*. To this group may be added Guildelüec in *Eliduc*, who, though happily married at the beginning, soon becomes unhappy, puzzled, and curious because of her husband's new and inexplicable behavior. We do not include the seneschal's wife in *Equitan* among the *mal mariées* because she is not unhappy at the beginning of the tale, nor does she become unhappy because of her spouse's treatment. A wife's unhappiness may result, however, not uniquely from her husband's behavior. The rebellious lady in *Yonec* curses her parents and the others who married her off to *cest gelus* and his body (vv. 83 and 84). The young girl in *Milun* too is unwillingly married off, in this case by her father. Certainly these two situations reflect the "lived experience" of the powerlessness of daughters of Marie's time.

Among the male lovers, "it is the concept of knighthood" that links all of them, the single exception being the squire in *Les Deus Amanz*, the young princess's suitor. According to Burgess, the knights who interest Marie "are men of achievement, lords or potential lords. They enjoy the heady combination of youth and fame... From the standpoint of rank and social status the concept of knighthood is crucial." Characterized by a number of movable adjectives and adjectival phrases selected for use in different combinations, such as *le plus amez*, *bel*, *le plus beaus*, *curteis*, *despendanz*, *francs*, *le plus fort et le plus fier*, *gent*, *de grant pris*, *hardiz*, *larges*, *le meudre chevalier*, *pruz*, *vaillanz*, these lovers, in Burgess's words, "are predominantly from the class of young, active well-connected knights in search of personal happiness."⁵⁴ In spite of the portability of conventional tags such as "pruz et vaillanz" applied to more than one hero, the figures of the male lover will, of course, show a great disparity because of the original circumstance in which each one finds himself, the *aventure* that befalls him, his resistance to adversity, his ingenuity, and capacity for suffering.

Within the male members of the triangle, seven husbands are mentioned, although one is absent as an actor in a story (i.e. King Mark in *Chevrefoil*). The husband in *Guigemar* is stereotypically old

⁵⁴ Glyn S. Burgess, "Social Status in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *The Spirit of the Court*, ed. Glyn S. Burgess and Robert A. Taylor (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 69–78, here 71–73.

and jealous (*li veils gelus*), characterized as a *velz hume* ("an old man," v. 210) and *gelus esteit a desmesure* ("excessively jealous," v. 213). Because of jealousy and fear of being cuckolded, he keeps his wife within a green marble enclosure, in an extraordinarily decorated chamber. In *Yonec*, the husband who married to have heirs (and has none), psychologically and physically abuses his young wife by confining her in his tower for more than seven years; he is twice portrayed as old (vv. 12 and 17), and then pejoratively as "that jealous old man" (*cist viel gelus*, v. 71).⁵⁵ In regard to social reality, Margaret Aziza Pappano has suggested that "Henry II's 15-year imprisonment of Eleanor [of Aquitaine] may have provided the impetus behind the images of imprisoned women in *Guigemar* and *Yonec*..."⁵⁶ In *Laüstic* the husband is depicted as neither old nor jealous (but, to the reader's knowledge, has no children). His wife is locked up, so to speak, in the fortified manor house in which they live. The husband's jealousy and anger are controlled until a certain event leads him to explosive and savage actions (vv. 91–120).

Another character type of husband is the one depicted as caring and loving at the opening of a tale. Here too, the representations of that role vary. The husband in *Le Fresne*, shown as loving, just and generous when first seen, remains true to character when he reappears towards the close of the story. At the very beginning of his tale, Bisclavret is depicted as a tender, loving spouse before his wife begins to question him mercilessly, forcing him to reveal his horrific secret. In his animal form at the king of Brittany's court, he behaves nobly and gently until provoked to rage. Milun, whose loving and caring nature for his infant son early on and concerned fidelity toward his lady over 20 years are manifest, will become her husband at the end.

Eliduc is indeed a case apart. A loving and concerned husband, he pledges fidelity to his wife when he is exiled from the court in Brittany, soon after the story opens. Overseas, during service as a hired soldier for the king of Exeter, he falls deeply in love with the young princess

⁵⁵ See Rupert T. Pickens, "Poétique et Sexualité chez Marie de France: L'Exemple de *Fresne*," in *Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble: Hommage à Jean Dufournet, Professeur à la Sorbonne Nouvelle*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1993), 3:1119–31, here 1125. He aptly comments that this character type—the jealous and sterile husband—locks up his wife.

⁵⁶ Margaret Aziza Pappano, "Marie de France, Aliénor d'Aquitaine, and the Alien Queen," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York, 2002), pp. 337–67, here 361, n. 17.

but is unable to bring himself to tell her he is married. Called back home by his king's need of his military expertise, he is also unable to speak to his spouse of his dilemma. Without planning what to do with the young woman and his wife, Eliduc returns to England, bringing the girl to his native land where his wife resolves the predicament of her husband-lover.

The protagonists of the triangle generally do not live in isolation. At times the reader finds them in the presence of relatives, some helpful, some not.⁵⁷ Not one of the relatives is superfluous to the particular narrative. A triad of aunts, each one of whom is helpful to the heroine and/or to a major figure, appears in *Les Deus Amanz*, *Le Fresne*, and *Milun*.⁵⁸ Of the members of familial relationships, the aunt figure (and here, each aunt is the sister of a mother) is the most frequently repeated. According to Cottille-Foley, "wealth and power characterize all three aunt figures." In *Les Deus Amanz* and *Milun*, "help from this providential character enables the heroine to gain independence from a typically patriarchal sphere of power and escape the fate imposed on her by her father."⁵⁹ Whereas in the two narratives just cited the aunt is a secular person, in *Le Fresne*, "a powerful abbess passes an abandoned baby off as her niece and raises her."⁶⁰ Cottille-Foley

⁵⁷ The several cases where the protagonist is bereft of family members and thereby of potential assistance when needed are: the wounded Guigemar when he leaves his country; Bisclavret when his human identity is stolen; Lanval who, in our judgment, is the most isolated of all until a change in his fortune occurs; the lady in *Laüstic*; the four suitors in *Chaitivel*; and Tristan and the queen in *Chevrefoil*.

⁵⁸ Cottille-Foley discusses "...how the *lais* show a gradual linguistic evolution of terms referring to family members": "In this evolution, the discrimination between maternal and paternal branches faded out. The term *aunte* evolved from *amita* which meant 'sister of the father' while *matertera* meant 'sister of the mother. The *aunte* found in *Les Deus Amanz* is actually a *matertera*... The aunt can be seen as a substitute for the dead mother in her protection of the daughter. The term *aunte* is thus particularly ironic in this regard: rather than backing the father, the aunt turns out to be the secret opponent who gives support to his daughter." See Cottille-Foley, "Feminine Empowerment," pp. 162–63.

⁵⁹ Cottille-Foley, "Feminine Empowerment," p. 163. For a nuanced feminist study of the heroine in *Les Deus Amanz*, "the pivotal point of the story," see June Hall McCash, "The *Mulier mediatrix* in the *Deus Amanz* of Marie de France," in *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness*, pp. 455–64, here 456.

⁶⁰ This abbess is one of the two in the *Lais* where few ecclesiastical figures appear or are mentioned: the chaplain at the beginning of *Yonec*; the abbot toward the end of the same story; the holy hermit (although entombed) in *Eliduc*; the wife Guildelüec who becomes an abbess at the close of *Eliduc*; and the wife, Guilliadun, who is placed by her husband in the abbey with Guildelüec. Cottille-Foley comments on the abbess-figure: "Marie's portrayal of abbesses confirms her preference in showing them as

carefully points out why the aunt figure is such an interesting one in Marie's *Lais*: it is "because of its transgressive potential." In respect to the socio-cultural aspect of marriage among wealthy families in the Middle Ages, a young woman "had no say in her wedding plans which had already been established by the previous generation." Only if "the head of the household (or the elders of the lineage)" were absent at the time of preparing a marriage agreement would the "mother, brother, sister and uncle" be able to carry out the formalities. Cottille-Foley remarks:

We can thus understand the elusive character of the aunts in the *lais*: they are positioned as "vanishing points." They can only support the heroine's choice (which is based on sentimental reasons) in a clandestine and oblique fashion: by providing the lover with a potion in *Les Deus Amanz* and by raising the hidden son in *Milun*.⁶¹

Two husbands have relatives who interact with the heroine in quite different ways. In *Yonec*, the old widowed sister serves as the unpleasant, strict guardian of the young wife, who is allowed to speak only with her sister-in-law's permission. In *Guigemar*, in contrast, the husband's niece, his sister's daughter who serves as companion to the wife, has a loving relationship with her. Eliduc, we find out, has two nephews who, pledged to secrecy, accompany him in his retinue on his return trip to England. And we will learn about the story of a young girl who has a twin sister in *Le Fresne*.

Leaving the familial milieu of the protagonists, we turn to review the character of greatest recurrence in the *Lais*: the head of feudal society, the king.⁶² Monarchs and their consorts are pertinent to our discussion, not so much for their status but for their involvement in love triangulations. Although Burgess declares that "eight of the poems

powerful figures. Indeed, even the education Fresne receives from the abbess is an empowering one... She is ready to confront the world but must oppose the role that patriarchal societal norms assign to her within triangular configurations. She must ignore the antagonistic feelings society expects her to harbor toward the other woman and recognize her as her own double" ("Feminine Empowerment," p. 169). For a history of the social reality of child abandonment, see the magisterial study by John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York, 1988).

⁶¹ Cottille-Foley, "Feminine Empowerment," pp. 163–64.

⁶² Burgess observes that the term *reis*, occurring 143 times in the *Lais*, is one of "the most widely used words in the text" ("Social Status," p. 70).

include a king,"⁶³ that does not mean the reader finds only eight monarchs, since two kings are present in both *Yonec* and *Eliduc*. Ranging widely in presentation, the king figure may be simply predicated, a member of a love triangle, a figure of magnanimity, or the eponymous non-hero of a *lai*. In three tales, a king is indicated but plays no role. In *Guigemar*, King Hoilas is presented as overlord of Oridials, sire of Liun (v. 30), who is Guigemar's father. This reference and the immediate portrait of Oridials's family group comprise the political, social, and genealogical framework in which Guigemar is placed. King Hoilas is never again mentioned, whereas the family setting comes again into play.⁶⁴ In *Yonec*, a summons by letter from the king is the pretext fabricated by the old jealous husband so that he can leave his wife to be observed completely alone in her chamber. King Mark, mentioned in *Chevrefoil*, is not "on stage." Burgess correctly notes that:

Marie's two most powerful kings, Arthur and Mark, are far from being her most favoured characters. Both treat the hero of their lay with a lack of understanding and compassion, condemning them to solitude and hardship. The lay of *Lanval* commences with an act of outright injustice by Arthur. So rank is clearly not synonymous with status or acceptable behaviour.⁶⁵

⁶³ Burgess, "Social Status," p. 70.

⁶⁴ Although generally presenting an astute analysis of *Guigemar*, H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., in our view, reads the prologue to that *lai* incorrectly on two accounts. See his "The Voice of the Hind," in *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, ed. Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Notre Dame, IN, 2005), pp. 132–69, here 137. He states that: "...the poem begins with an extended account of historical, genealogical, geographical, and political detail—King Hoel of Leonnais and his vassal Oridials; the mother and sisters, education and travels of the latter's son Guigemar—which is never used again" (p. 137). According to Marie's text, Guigemar has only *one* sister, depicted as *une fille bele*, named Noguent (vv. 35–36). Moreover, after military service during which he has acquired high reputation, he returns home to visit, his familial background given once again as each family member is indicated by kinship.

⁶⁵ Burgess, "Social Status," p. 70. See John Gillingham, "The Cultivation of History, Legend, and Courtesy at the Court of Henry II," in *Writers of the Reign of Henry II: Twelve Essays*, ed. Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones (New York, 2006), pp. 25–52. He states that during the reign of Henry II "the figure of King Arthur was not regarded as a cultural asset specific to the Angevin dynasty" (p. 28). Moreover, says Gillingham, "the earliest evidence for Arthur being turned into the model for the English king that he later became dates from the 1190s and from the reign of Richard I..." (p. 38).

Other kings who form part of a love triangle are the unnamed ruler in *Les Deus Amanz*, the incestuous father who attempts to keep his daughter all to himself; Equitan, the non-hero who abdicates his kingly responsibilities; and Muldumarec, the lady's lover in *Yonec*, who at the end of the tale is revealed to be a king. Three other kings exist outside of a love triangulation. The unnamed king of Brittany shows his magnanimity and compassion when, recognizing the human in the beast, he rescues the werewolf from the hunting dogs. In *Eliduc*, two kings form part of the cast. Met at the beginning of the tale, the king of Brittany, having listened to courtiers' envious remarks, unjustly dismisses his loyal servitor, Eliduc, from court. The second is the elderly king of Exeter, with whom Eliduc has found paid military service after leaving his country.

The king's consort appears infrequently, in just four *lais*. The character type of the queen is always anonymous, although familiar background stories of Kings Mark and Arthur easily allow the reader/listener to identify *la reine* in *Chevrefoil* and *Lanval*, Iseut and Guenevere, respectively, where she forms part of a love triangle. In *Les Deus Amanz*, the king's dead wife is predicated; his loss is the reason why the princess comforts him. Guilliadun, when introduced into the story line in *Eliduc*, is presented as the daughter of a king and a queen who is never present (v. 16). The only time a queen and king are seen together occurs in *Lanval*, when Lanval is on trial because of the queen's false accusation. Finally, there is a wife who would be queen: the wicked spouse of the seneschal in *Equitan* seizes upon the king's words, turning them into a plan to murder her husband by having tubs of boiling water prepared for the king's and her husband's baths.

Objects often play a significant role in the *Lais*, as Burgess, Rupert T. Pickens, and Whalen, among others, have noted. Pickens categorizes objects into three types: "verbaux," "quasi-verbaux," and "non-verbaux."⁶⁶ Whalen understands "verbal object" to signify "any object or textile that contains an explicit, identifiable, written text, such as the hazel stick...or the fragment of embroidered samite in *Laüstic*..."⁶⁷ For Burgess, "a noticeable feature of Marie's stories is the emphasis she places on objects, which consequently take on thematic and symbolic importance." Moreover, he notes that "other objects, often occurring

⁶⁶ Rupert. T. Pickens, "Poétique et sexualité," 1120–21.

⁶⁷ Whalen, *The Poetics of Memory*, p. 27.

in pairs, can easily be envisaged as symbols relating to the bringing together of true lovers: the shirt and the knot in *Guigemar*..."⁶⁸

Objects are rarely seen or presented in just one *lai*, as is the case of the tubs (*les cuves*) mentioned earlier. That is true, moreover, for additional unique objects: the lady's *ceinture*, the knotted shirt, the magic pillow and ship in *Guigemar*, and specific birds such as the hawk, the nightingale, and the swan. Some types of objects recur, however, on two or more occasions: rings, belts, beds, ships, for instance, each time with variation(s). Beds are frequently particularized (six tales), and often implied, certainly the furnishing most commonly associated with the lovers. A conspicuous feature of Marie's narrative technique is to group the same object in three consecutive stories: the triads of the "bed-lays" of *Guigemar*, *Equitan*, and *Le Fresne*; of the "bird-lays" of *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, and *Milun*; and of the "tombs" in *Les Deus Amanz*, *Yonec*, and *Laüstic*. In each triad the tales are thematically linked with the object having, however, a different symbolic value. The triptych in which *le merveilleux* appears, *Guigemar*, *Yonec*, *Lanval*, is noteworthy, states Burgess, for "the stress laid on magnificent beds."⁶⁹ Here Burgess errs, for the third sustained description is, rather, of the sumptuous pavilion in which "...un lit mut bel / Li drap valeient un chastel" is placed (*Lanval*, vv. 97–98). No visualization of the fairy's bed is given. It is indisputable, however, that each sustained description presents a striking example of Marie's art. According to Whalen, Marie's ability to use description "often and effectively" is "the defining attribute of her literary talent." Further, "in *Guigemar* the description of the principal objects organizes the narrative and helps to compartmentalize the episodes in the *loci* of memory."⁷⁰

In dramatic contrast to the visible groups of triads and the triptych of sumptuous beds, a subtle element of Marie's narrative art merits attention: her ability to play with and on words, creating not only puns but deliberate repetition of a word. Often, a word intentionally repeated will accrete unto itself different nuances or meanings. This feature of playing with words appears in only five stories, with word-play of homonyms in three. In *Guigemar* the play upon *plaie* (wound) and *plait* (knot), the wound which draws the couple together and the

⁶⁸ Burgess, *Lais*, p. xxxi.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Whalen, *The Poetics of Memory*, pp. 3–4.

knot which “only the lovers can tie and untie,” becomes a focus of Roberta L. Krueger’s gender criticism.⁷¹ In *Les Deus Amanz*, the play is on the double meaning of *meschine*, signifying both “remedy” or “medicine,” and “young girl.” To prepare himself for the test, the young man travels from the niece (*la meschine*) to the aunt in Salerno, an expert in *meschines* (medicines) (*Deus Amanz*, vv. 95–99), returning to the *meschine* with a *meschine* of herbs.⁷²

In *Milun* we find the unique situation of two plays upon words, each one a pun and each connected to one of the sub-plots which “interconnect in a complex fashion.”⁷³ Here, puns are an important narrative device. The means by which a 20-year love correspondence is carried out is a *cisne*, a swan, but the word *cisne* also means *signe*. The animal *cisne* is “a private message enveloped by a public covering.” Later on, an extraordinary young knight, *Sanz Per*, appears. Spence points out that “*sans per* is also *sans pere*—the one without a peer is also the one without a father.” Furthermore, in Spence’s reading, “the unrivalled one is seen as the fatherless one by the one [Milun] who has the power to make him fathered.” Milun, who up to the time of the joust with the young knight had himself been *sans per*, becomes simply *pere*. For Milun, “his identity is realized through a pun.”⁷⁴

In *Bisclavret Marie* plays with the term *meisun*. It occurs twice at the beginning, where it appears, meaningfully, at the opening and the close of the couple’s embedded discourse about the husband’s absences that initiates narrative action (vv. 30 and 96). The term referring to the man-beast’s home as a human and also his dwelling in the woods is somehow connected to his double nature. The king’s residence where he lives as a royal pet is identified, first as a *chastel* (v. 165), then as the *paleis* (v. 196). *Meisun* reappears only after Bisclavret’s attack on the lady’s husband at court when the story reports the spectators’ astonishment: “Ceo dient tut par la meisun / Ke il nel fet mie sanz reisun” [Throughout the entire household people said that he (Bisclavret) did not attack without a reason] (vv. 207–08). In that use, *meisun*

⁷¹ Krueger, “Beyond Debate,” pp. 83–84.

⁷² See Bloch, *Anonymous Marie*, p. 90, for more comment on this passage. For the aunt wise in medical matters, see Peggy McCracken, “Women and Medicine in Medieval French Narrative,” *Exemplaria* 5.2 (1993), 39–62.

⁷³ Spence, *Texts and the Self*, p. 134. The complications of *Milun*’s plot and sub-plots are skillfully untangled by Spence on pp. 134–35.

⁷⁴ Spence, *Texts and the Self*, pp. 134–35.

has acquired a different meaning. Finally, *meisun* in the first sense of "home, dwelling, residence" is used in relating the return home of *li barun* who had attended the king's feast (v. 214), perhaps in implicit contrast to the end of the tale when Bisclavret is shown in the king's residence, on a royal bed.

The term *vassal* appears first in verse 3 of the prologue to *Lanval*. Its use so early in the text is extremely significant, for not only is this the only occasion when Marie calls a protagonist a *vassal*, but also vassalage, its service, and rewards will be the central theme of the story.⁷⁵ The word recurs in two other meaningful passages which are turning-points: when King Arthur apostrophizes Lanval as his *vassal* in his official accusation (v. 363) before the court; and when the fairy mistress, after a lengthy postponement of her arrival, immediately announces her love for a *vassal* of Arthur (v. 615) and declares that the queen wrongly accused Lanval.⁷⁶

Several other distinctive elements of Marie's narrative technique merit brief attention. The narrative structure of the individual *lai* tends to be tri-partite, with a few exceptional instances of symmetrical composition, as in *Laüstic*, where significant subject material (the husband's outburst of anger) is located at the exact mid-point. Furthermore, Whalen points to Marie's remarkable use of anaphora "to establish the name of the hero [Lanval] in the minds of her audience" (*Lanval*, vv. 209–13). As for Marie's lexis, Whalen emphasizes the high frequency of "words associated with seeing and perceiving," and a large use of "vocabulary that evokes the aural and oral

⁷⁵ Marie will refer to Milun's son (who is not the protagonist) as *vassal* (v. 434), but there the term denotes "youth," "young man," with no emphasis upon service. One other time a protagonist will be called *vassal*: in *Guigemar* the wounded doe addresses Guigemar as her *vassal* (v. 107), a term suggestive of the hero's future service of Love.

⁷⁶ In *Lanval* we find a remarkable instance of the hospitality motif, used before in a private context in *Guigemar* and *Equitan*, now in a very public setting at court when two groups of the fairy mistress's maidens in sequence command Arthur to have appropriate lodgings prepared for her. All that 'busyness' serves not only to create suspense by postponing her arrival, but heightens her dramatic entrance. Then too, Marie subverts the hospitality motif; the fairy mistress's immediate announcement that she will not stay at court cancels the preceding preparations and makes Arthur and his courtiers, so eager to serve her, seem somewhat foolish. See Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Narrative Invention in Twelfth-Century Romance: The Convention of Hospitality 1160–1200* (Lexington, KY, 1980) in which the author examines eight 12th-century romances but does not, however, consider the genre of the *lai*.

faculties.”⁷⁷ The device of specularity (a story within a story) is often used; as Bruckner remarks, there is “a significant amount of repetition or retelling of important events, recounted either by the narrator or by the characters.”⁷⁸ The story pattern of “a man with two wives” appears several times.⁷⁹ In addition, “parallel characterization” of lovers occurs in *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, *Les Deus Amanz*, *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, and *Chevrefoil*.⁸⁰ Finally, the device of *discours indirect libre* is “surely one of Marie’s most distinctive narratorial ploys,” playing a crucial role “in defining the relationship between narrator and characters.”⁸¹

Let us now consider some socio-cultural and socio-political aspects of the *Lais* not yet contextualized. As Burgess correctly remarks, “the three fundamental activities of the medieval knight were hunting, tournaments and war... Indeed, these three activities serve as important literary devices, and Marie uses them in varying degree within the structure of her stories.”⁸² The hunt figures in three stories (*Guigemar*, *Equitan*, and *Bisclavret*); in two of those stories that activity seems to be perfectly ordinary but will prove to be otherwise. In *Equitan*, the hunt is, however, a sinister deception from its very beginning. As we have pointed out elsewhere, “there is clearly deep significance that the ruse invented by the king involves his taking the role of the hunter... For we shall soon see that it is the hunt and the pursuit of the seneschal’s wife that the king intends—and of which the lady is still unaware.”⁸³ Further, in the course of the narrative the victimizer will become the victim.

As for the element of tournaments, it appears slightly more frequently. In *Le Fresne* and *Laüstic*, tournaments form part of the background activities of knights and squires. In *Milun*, tournaments are the venue where Milun and later, an unknown young knight, fight to acquire renown and esteem. Much later, a tournament becomes the

⁷⁷ Whalen, *The Poetics of Memory*, pp. 74–76. Bruckner also notes these qualities (*Shaping Romance*, p. 190).

⁷⁸ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 186.

⁷⁹ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 171, comments on this narrative pattern: “In a sense, the placement of *Chievrefoil* right before *Eliduc* rekindles our expectations about what may happen when a man has two wives—the story pattern that appears in *Fresne* and *Eliduc*, as well as the *Tristan* story.”

⁸⁰ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 167, in respect to the similarities between lovers.

⁸¹ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 185.

⁸² Burgess, *Lais*, p. xxi.

⁸³ Rothschild, *Narrative Technique*, p. 25.

site of the recognition scene where the young knight *Sanz Per* and *Milun* discover their familial identities. In *Chaitivel* a tournament, “described by Marie with considerable attention to detail,”⁸⁴ becomes even more important: it becomes the focus of the story relating the fate of four participants.

The motif of war, says Burgess, “as one would expect in short stories dominated by the theme of love,” plays no “major role in Marie’s poems.” War is mentioned in passing at the opening of *Guigemar* (vv. 28 and 52) and in *Milun*, later on (vv. 384–86). Yet, “in some ways, there was little difference between tournaments and war” for “both offered the sort of opportunities” knights and squires would seek. It is meaningful, however, that in the first and last narratives (*Guigemar* and *Eliduc*, respectively) war becomes an important “structural device”: at the end of *Guigemar*, it allows the protagonist to win his lady, and, at the beginning of *Eliduc*, it is “the means by which *Eliduc* is brought into contact with the lady who will become his second wife.”⁸⁵

A *jeu de société*, chess, appears in *Milun* and *Eliduc*. We have commented elsewhere that *Milun* is one of two *lais* (the other is *Guigemar*) “where Marie arbitrarily brings in extra characters.” Here where the “the two knights playing chess in the hall”⁸⁶ might have impeded the passage of the messenger carrying the swan, they do not; they are totally absorbed. As Maria A. Rebbert argues in her discussion of board games of Celtic literature, especially the game of *fidchell*, in *Milun*:

...the woman is...implicitly the stake of a chess game which never actually takes place... The chess game appears when *Milun* attempts to reestablish contact with his lady, now married, after abandoning her to gain fame in tournaments abroad. *Milun*’s servant, bearing the swan which will serve as the lovers’ messenger, must circumvent a chess game between two unnamed knights in order to reach the lady.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Burgess, *Lais*, p. xxii.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

⁸⁶ Rothschild, *Narrative Technique*, p. 228.

⁸⁷ Maria A. Rebbert, “The Celtic Origins of the Chess Symbolism in *Milun* and *Eliduc*,” in *In Quest of Marie de France: A Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantal A. Maréchal (Lewiston, NY, 1992), pp. 148–60, here 156.

Concluding her analysis of the use of chess in *Milun*, Rebbert states:

Although it occurs later in the lay, the chess game may well figure these expected negotiations [for marriage] which Milun neglects for love of the tournament. It is because Milun has neglected them, that, at the moment the chess game appears, he is obliged to be content with a clandestine relationship. Since the participants in the circumvented game remain unspecified, the game can figure both the rivalry with the lady's husband and Milun's failure to negotiate with her father.⁸⁸

In *Eliduc*, "the chess game's figurative role is most clearly suggested." The game appears when Eliduc comes to speak with the king's daughter a second time. "If [he] had not left a wife in his own country, a fact unknown to his hosts, he would now be the most likely candidate for the girl's hand." For Rebbert, "the fact that her father is playing in the girl's room... suggests that the chess game represents the negotiations which Eliduc is now expected to carry out." Which, of course, he does not, for the princess draws him away from the game for a private conversation during which she declares her love and when he is unavailable for the king's potential invitation to join the game. In addition, the secrecy of their relation is increased when Eliduc "later takes her by stealth from her father's house rather than publicly requesting her hand." Rebbert interprets the use of the chess game as:

...a commentary, early on in the lay, on the inappropriateness of Eliduc's behavior toward the young girl. If Eliduc is going to accept the girl's love, respect for her status as a king's daughter requires that he negotiate with her father... because an elopement would have been inappropriate to her status.⁸⁹

The final socio-cultural aspects to be considered are bloodletting and bathing, occurring only in *Equitan*. Whereas the king's subterfuge of private blood-letting is used to arrange several intimate meetings with the seneschal's wife, the act of bathing is planned just once. It is never indicated who performs the blood-letting; there is a "total absence of bloodletters," a detail which Brumlik also observes:

⁸⁸ Rebbert, "Celtic Origins," pp. 156–57.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 154–55.

We know that bloodletting in the Middle Ages was increasingly done by women...I do not think that Marie intended the reader to make the assumption that the seneschal's wife was a bloodletter for she makes a point of having no one present who might notice the woman.⁹⁰

As for the bath, after detailed preparations for what was to be a social occasion shared by the king and seneschal, it never takes place. After the seneschal dramatically returns to the chamber, he breaks down the guarded door to find the two lovers on the king's bed. The *dénouement* follows immediately, with the two lovers' death in the tubs of boiling water.

A socio-political reality serving as a plot device is that of marriage, present in several poems but especially significant in *Equitan*, *Le Fresne*, and *Yonec*. In *Equitan* and *Le Fresne*, as the respective narratives unfold, marriage will become a political necessity: the fact that King Equitan's people are greatly disturbed by their lord's refusal to marry often reaches his mistress's ears; Gurun's landed knights threaten him that, if he does not leave his concubine and marry a noble woman, they will no longer serve him as their lord. Equitan's mistress, the wife of his seneschal, serving her own interests perhaps more than those of the king, promises her lover she will see to it that she can marry him. In *Le Fresne*, Gurun gives in to his knights' pressuring words, thereby abandoning his sweetheart. Reference is made to the dynastic purposes of marriage in *Le Fresne* and *Yonec*, where concern is expressed for the respective lord's *heritage*. Only in *Yonec* does marriage form part of the narrative background, having taken place before the action begins. Furthermore, no reference is made either to the old lord of Carwent's knights or his people in regard to his marriage.

This chapter offering an account of some of the myriad literary, socio-cultural, and socio-political aspects of the *Lais* provides the following: an overview of the history of Marie's *Lais* and her identity; an examination of the General Prologue and the prologue to *Guigemar*; a presentation of many elements composing the complexity of the tales (e.g. the criss-crossing of multiple themes, principal and ancillary, and motifs across the 12 stories); a review of the principal character types in the love triangles in their repetition and variations; a selective presentation of approaches, perspectives, and methods of

⁹⁰ Brumlik, "Secondary Characters," p. 190.

20th- and 21st-century scholars of the *Lais*; an enumeration of recurring key words in the individual prologues and epilogues; a discussion of selected objects, individually and grouped in triads; word-plays and puns; a brief mention of several other distinctive features of Marie's narrative technique; and a short review of socio-cultural and socio-political realities in the narratives.

The aspects above form but a very small number indeed of those already discovered and discussed in the continually increasing scholarship on the *Lais*. There surely are others remaining to be uncovered as attentive readers and critics continue to "gloser la lettre," seeking to clarify obscurities through constantly evolving perspectives, approaches, and methods.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARIE DE FRANCE AND THE ANONYMOUS LAYS

Glyn S. Burgess

Of the approximately 35 Old French narrative lays that have survived, it is generally agreed that the 12 found in London, British Library, Harley 978 (MS *H*) can be grouped together as the *Lais* of Marie de France.¹ In Alfred Ewert's edition, these lays amount to 5,718 lines of text, with an average length of 476.5 lines.² Most of the remaining lays are anonymous, but within this group it is possible to identify 11 lays that are representative of the anonymous lays as a whole, yet form a distinctive corpus of material. These lays were first brought together as a collection by Prudence Tobin in 1976, and they have recently been re-edited and translated into English by Leslie Brook and myself.³ Their titles are, in alphabetical order, *Desiré*, *Doon*, *Espine*, *Graelent*, *Guingamor*, *Lecheor*, *Melion*, *Nabaret*, *Trot*, *Tydorel*, and *Tyolet*.⁴ In the Burgess and Brook edition, these 11 lays (sometimes called the anonymous Breton lays) amount to 5,319 lines, with an average length of 483.5 lines.⁵ In order to assess whether there are any marked

¹ Nine of Marie's lays are found in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, nouv. acq. fr. 1104 (MS *S*), the exceptions being *Laüstic*, *Chaitivel*, and *Eliduc*.

² Alfred Ewert, *Marie de France: Lais* (Oxford, 1944; repr. with introduction and bibliography by Glyn S. Burgess, London, 1995). All quotations are taken from this edition, but the edition by Jean Rychner, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, (Classiques Français du Moyen Age) 93 (Paris, 1966) has also been consulted. In addition to the 12 lays in MS *H* there is also a 56-line General Prologue. All English translations are my own.

³ Prudence M.O'H. Tobin, *Les Lais anonymes des XII^e et XIII^e siècles: édition critique de quelques lays bretons*, (Publications romanes et françaises) 143 (Geneva, 1976); Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook, *French Arthurian Literature IV: Eleven Old French Narrative Lays*, (Arthurian Archives) 14 (Cambridge, 2007); all quotations are taken from this edition.

⁴ Eight of these anonymous lays are preserved in MS *S*, the exceptions being *Melion*, *Nabaret*, and *Trot* (see n. 1 above). For a full list of manuscripts, see Ewert, ed., pp. xviii–xix, repr. p. xxxv, and Burgess and Brook, p. 7. When giving references, I shall use the Harley order for Marie's lays and, as they are arranged differently in the Tobin and the Burgess-Brook editions, alphabetical order for the anonymous lays.

⁵ Tobin has 5,236 lines because, unlike Burgess and Brook, she does not edit *Desiré*, *Espine*, and *Graelent* from MS *S*.

differences between Marie's lays and the 11 anonymous lays, I shall examine the 23 poems from the point of view of (i) their prologues and epilogues, (ii) the male characters and the theme of chivalry, (iii) the female characters and the theme of love, (iv) the supernatural or *merveilleux* element, and (v) the objects and symbols they contain.

I. Prologues and epilogues

(a) Prologues

Marie's lays and almost all the anonymous lays begin with a prologue (*Lecheor* has an introduction rather than a prologue). The prologues in Marie's lays occupy 110 lines of text, varying from two lines (*Le Fresne*) to 26 lines (*Guigemar*). In the anonymous lays there is no equivalent to the General Prologue found in MS *H* (but not in MS *S*).⁶ Although she only gives her name once ("Oëz, seignurs, ke dit Marie" [Hear, my lords, the words of Marie], *Guigemar*, v. 3), in the first part of the prologue to *Guigemar* she proclaims her sense of responsibility ("Ki en sun tens pas ne s'oblie" [Who in her time is not unmindful of her obligations], v. 4),⁷ her conviction that her stories are based on good material ("bone mateire," v. 1), her determination to reach a high standard of literary performance ("Mult li peise si bien n'est faite" [Is very upset if it (the material) is not well handled], v. 2), and her expectation of praise for any success she may achieve (vv. 5–6). Writers regularly complain of hostility towards their works, but her comment that envious *gangleür* [gossips, scandal-mongers] and *losengier* [backbiters, slanderers] behave like "malveis chien coart felun" [vicious, cowardly, evil dogs], biting others out of treachery, has the stamp of personal experience. In v. 15 Marie uses the first person form *voil* [I wish], and the second part of the prologue contains the forms *sai* (v. 19), *conterai* (v. 21), and *mosterai* (v. 24). In the remaining prologues she repeats the forms *voil* (*Bisclavret*, v. 14; *Chevrefoil*, v. 1) and *mosterai* (*Milun*, v. 24), and we also find the forms *dirai* (in the for-

⁶ For the large number of studies devoted to the General Prologue, see my *Marie de France: An Analytical Bibliography* (London, 1977, supplements 1, 1986, 2, 1997, and 3, Woodbridge, 2007).

⁷ It is not entirely clear what "en sun tens" [lit. "in her time"] means. It could convey the notion of "in her turn," i.e. she is linking herself to earlier writers, or "given the opportunity, now that her time has come," i.e. she is seeing herself in terms of contemporary writers and circumstances.

mula “vus dirai”: *Le Fresne*, v. 1; *Laüstic*, v. 1; *Eliduc*, v. 5), *m’entremet* (*Bisclavret*, v. 1), *numeraï* (*Chaitivel*, v. 4), *oï* (*Chaitivel*, v. 2), and occurrences of the first person singular of the past indefinite tense (“ai commencé,” *Yonec*, v. 1; “ai trové,” *Chevrefoil*, v. 6).

The 36-line prologue to *Tyolet* is far longer than any of Marie’s prologues. *Espine* and *Melion* have 14-line prologues, but those in the other anonymous lays range from two to six lines (the ten prologues occupy 88 lines). There is no equivalent to Marie’s comments on herself or her art, but we do find some first-person verbs and possessive adjectives: *conterai* (*Trot*, v. 3, *Tydorel*, v. 3), *dirai* (*Guingamor*, v. 1), and *voil* (*Trot*, v. 1). Like Marie (*Chevrefoil*, v. 3, *Eliduc*, v. 4), the anonymous authors insist on the truth of their tales (*Espine*, vv. 1–2, *Guingamor*, v. 3, *Trot*, v. 4).

Key features of both sets of prologues are the references to the term *lai* and its association with the concept of *aventure*. The term *lai(s)* occurs in each of Marie’s 12 prologues. In *Guigemar*, the first lay in the Harley collection, she announces her intention to relate “les contes.../ Dunt li Bretun unt fait les lais” [the tales...from which the Bretons have composed their lays] (vv. 19–20). The prologue to *Equitan*, which could have been the first prologue Marie composed, tells us more about the Bretons.⁸ They were “noble barun” [noble barons], who in days gone by (*jadis*) composed *lais* so that they would be remembered and not fall into oblivion (“suleient.../ Fere les lais pur remembrance” [used...to compose lays for posterity], vv. 3, 7). This notion of composing the lays “pur remembrance” also occurs in the General Prologue (v. 35), in *Bisclavret* (v. 318), and in *Desiré* (v. 4).⁹ Marie also associates the *lai* with the Bretons in the prologues to the *Deus Amanz* (v. 5), *Laüstic* (v. 2), and *Eliduc* (v. 1), but not in the General Prologue.¹⁰

⁸ For my suggestion that Marie’s lays were composed in the order *Equitan*, *Chaitivel*, *Bisclavret*, *Le Fresne*, *Deus Amanz*, *Laüstic*, *Lanval*, *Yonec*, *Guigemar*, *Milun*, *Chevrefoil*, and then *Eliduc*, see *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Context* (Athens, GA, 1987), pp. 1–34.

⁹ For a study of memory, remembrance, and oblivion and their link to rhetoric and Marie’s poetics, see Logan E. Whalen, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (Washington, DC, 2008).

¹⁰ There are also two examples of *bretan(s)* [the Breton (or the British?) language] (*Bisclavret*, v. 3, and *Lanval*, v. 4).

Just as Marie can *dire un lai* (*Le Fresne*, v. 1), she can *dire une aventure* (*Laüstic*, v. 1; *Chaitivel*, v. 3).¹¹ She uses the term *aventure* or *aventures* in seven of the prologues (the others are *Guigemar*, v. 24, *Equitan*, v. 4, *Lanval*, v. 1, *Deus Amanz*, v. 2, and *Yonec*, v. 3). In *Equitan* she states that the Bretons composed lays from the *aventures* they had heard and that they had happened to many people (“Des aventures que oiënt, / Ki a plusur gent aveneient,” vv. 4–5).¹² The *aventure* is thus the core of the narrative, being both its subject-matter and its rationale. Marie sees herself as recounting (*dire*, *cunter*, *mostrer*) the lay, the *aventure*, or the *aventure d’un lai* (*Lanval*, v. 1).

This intermingling of the notions of authorial presence, the *lai*, and the *aventure* also occurs in the anonymous lays: “M’entente ai mise et ma cure / En raconter une aventure, / Dont cil qui a ce tens vesquirent / Por remembrance .I. lai en firent. / Ce est le lay du Desirré” [I have devoted my effort and attention to relating an adventure from which those alive at the time composed a lay for posterity: this is the lay of the Desired One] (*Desiré*, vv. 1–5); “D’un lay vos dirai l’aventure... / Guingamor apele on le lai” [I shall tell you the story of a lay... the lay is called Guingamor] (*Guingamor*, vv. 1, 4); “L’aventure d’un lai novel, / Que l’en apele Tydorel / Vos conterai comme ele avint” [The story of a new lay, which is called Tydorel, I shall relate to you as it happened] (*Tydorel*, vv. 1–3); “Une aventure vos voil dire... / Com il avint vos conterai... / L’aventure fu molt estraigne” [I want to recount to you an adventure... I shall relate it to you as it happened... the adventure was very remarkable] (*Trot*, vv. 1, 3, 5). The concept of *aventure* remains central to these authors (seven of the 11 lays mention it in the prologue, and eight include the term *lai*). Three lays mention the Bretons (“Bretons en firent lais plusurs” [The Bretons composed a number of lays about them], *Tyolet*, v. 35; “li Breton / Apel[e]rent cest lai Doon” [The Bretons called this lay Doon], *Doon*, vv. 5–6; “Ce nos racontent li Breton” [So the Bretons tell us], *Lecheor*, v. 2) and one refers to Brittany (“En Bretaigne fu li laiz fet / Ke nus apellum Nabaret” [In Brittany was composed the lay which we call Nabaret], *Nabaret*, vv. 1–2).

¹¹ In *Eliduc* there is example of *dire le cunte d’un lai* (vv. 1–3).

¹² The verb *avenir* also occurs in *Bisclavret* (v. 6), *Lanval* (v. 2), and *Deus Amanz* (v. 1).

Marie often reveals in her prologues the names of the protagonists of the lay (e.g. *Equitan*, v. 11, *Yonec*, vv. 9–10, *Chevrefoil*, v. 7) or its title (e.g. *Le Fresne*, v. 1, *Deus Amanz*, v. 6, *Laüstic*, v. 3, *Milun*, v. 5, *Chaitivel*, vv. 6–8, *Chevrefoil*, v. 2). Occasionally she mentions other languages, even incorporating specific words: “Bisclavret ad nun en bretan, / Garwaf l’apelent li Norman” [Bisclavret is its name in Breton, the Normans call it Garwaf] (*Bisclavret*, vv. 3–4); “En bretans l’apelent Lanval” [In Breton they call it Lanval] (*Lanval*, v. 4); “Ceo est russignol en franceis / E nihtegale en dreit engleis” [That is Rossignol in French and Nightingale in correct English] (*Laüstic*, vv. 5–6). She does not normally say much about the story itself, but twice she mentions that the lovers will die (*Deus Amanz*, v. 6, *Chevrefoil*, v. 10). The anonymous lays of *Desiré* (v. 5), *Doon* (vv. 1, 4), *Guingamor* (v. 4), *Tydorel* (v. 2), and *Nabaret* (v. 2) give the title of the lay in the prologue, and *Graelent* (v. 1), *Melion* (v. 6), and *Nabaret* (v. 3) mention their respective male protagonists. The prologues to *Tyolet* (vv. 1–36) and *Melion* (vv. 1–4, 11–14) provide details of the Arthurian background to the story.¹³ Unlike those to Marie’s lays, two prologues mention the musical element: “N’i a gueres bon harpeor / Ne sache les notes harper” [There is scarcely a good harpist who does not know how to play the melody] (*Doon*, vv. 2–3); “Bons en est li lais a oïr / Et les notes(i)s a retenir” [The lay is good to listen to and the melody good to retain] (*Graelent*, vv. 3–4); see *Guigemar*, vv. 885–86.

Marie’s prologues provide a few hints concerning the composition of the original lays (General Prologue, vv. 35–38, *Equitan*, vv. 1–7), but she has no equivalent to the opening lines of *Espine*, *Lecheor*, and *Tyolet*. The author of *Espine* informs us that he is making known written stories that have been hidden for a long time, but still exist in the church of Saint Aaron in Caerleon (cf. *Yonec*, vv. 467–68), where he found them; these stories, he says, are also known in Brittany (vv. 5–11). *Tyolet*’s lengthy prologue purports to tell us something about the original composition and transmission of lays. Brave knights would go in search of “beles aventures” [fine adventures], and on returning to court those who “found” such adventures would recount their experiences (vv. 7–24).¹⁴ In *Lecheor* knights and beautiful ladies

¹³ In *Trot* the Arthurian material belongs to the introduction to the lay rather than to the prologue (vv. 9–12).

¹⁴ The verb *trover* [to find, invent, compose] is used four times in 11 lines of *Tyolet* (vv. 16, 20, 23, 26).

are said to gather together once a year, at the festival of Saint Pantelion, to exchange stories of the chivalric and amorous adventures in which they had been involved during the past year. On these occasions the finest deeds were turned into a lay, with the addition of music and song. Composed collectively, the lays were preserved by clerics and knights and performed by skilled musicians who carried them forward until they become known in many lands. In *Tyolet* the worthy clerics at court ("preude clerc," v. 27) wrote down the stories, not in the vernacular but in the more prestigious Latin language: the lays would thus be available to future generations (vv. 31–32). *Tyolet* informs us that these stories, having been translated from Latin into the vernacular, were still being recounted (the verb *raconter* is used in vv. 25 and 33). Tradition has it ("Si con dient nos ancessors" [As our ancestors tell us], v. 36) that from these stories the Bretons composed many lays. The only substantial difference between the accounts in *Lecheor* and *Tyolet* lies in the reference to Latin versions interposed between the original oral tale and the Breton lay.¹⁵

(b) *Epilogues*

It is not always easy to distinguish a true epilogue from a conclusion (e.g. *Lanval* and *Chevrefoil*). In Ewert's edition, nine of Marie's epilogues consist of four lines (for *Equitan* Ewert indicates four lines, but Rychner has a final block of eight lines). The epilogues reinforce the points made in the prologues that the stories are *lais* (seven examples) and *aventures* (six examples). On four occasions Marie tells her audience that the lay was originally composed by the Bretons (*Equitan*, v. 312, *Deus Amanz*, v. 244, *Laüstic*, v. 159, *Eliduc*, v. 1182).¹⁶

Ten of the anonymous lays have clear-cut epilogues, varying in length from two lines (*Lecheor*, *Tydorel*, *Melion*, *Trot*) to ten lines (*Espine*). The final line of *Tyolet* is more of an *explicit* than an epilogue

¹⁵ For further discussion, see Burgess and Brook, pp. 86–87 and 282–83. Lucien Foulet urges us to "nous méfier des affirmations tranchantes des prologues" in "Marie de France et les Bretons," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 29 (1905), 19–56, 293–322 (p. 40). Walter Pagani, "Prologhi e epiloghi des *lais* anonimi bretoni," in *Studia in honorem Prof. M. de Riquer*, 4 vols (Barcelona, 1986–81), 4:571–91, is more positive towards the authors' observations.

¹⁶ In *Eliduc* the Bretons are referred to as the "li auntien Bretun curteis," who "firent le lai pur remembrer, / Que hum nel deüst pas oblir" (vv. 1182–84); with these words the collection comes to an end. The "auncien" who composed the lay of *Melion* are presumably to be equated with the "auntien Bretun" of *Eliduc* (v. 1182).

("De Tyolet le lai ci fine" [Here ends the lay of Tyolet], v. 704). If we include *Tyolet*, the 11 epilogues occupy 42 lines of text, compared to 48 lines in Marie (excluding *Lanval*). Overall, they are very similar to those in Marie's lays. Six use the term *lai* at least once (*Desiré*, *Espine*, *Lecheor*, *Nabaret*, *Trot*, *Tyolet*), and four contain the terms *aventure* or *avenir* (both terms appear in *Espine*). Six refer to the Bretons. The formula found in *Equitan* and the *Deus Amanz* ("Li Bretun en firent un lai" [The Bretons composed a lay about it]) occurs again in *Espine* (v. 506) and, with a minor variation, in *Tydorel* (v. 490). The variant found in *Laüstic*, v. 159 ("Un lai en firent li Bretun") occurs again in *Graelent* (v. 756) and *Trot* (v. 303).

Both Marie and the anonymous authors refer in the epilogues to the titles of the lays. Five of the anonymous lays use the verb *apeler*, whereas Marie does so only once (*Laüstic*, v. 160). The terms *nom* or *nommer* occur in four anonymous lays and in *Le Fresne* (v. 518). Two of the anonymous lays refer to the melody of the lay ("Firent les notes li Breton" [The Bretons composed the melody], *Doon*, v. 285; "De Nabarez un lai noterent" [They set to music a lay about Nabaret], v. 47). Marie in *Guigemar* tells us that the lay was performed "on harp and on rote" [en harpe e en rote] and that "the melody is good to hear" [bonë est a oïr la note] (vv. 885–86). Musical skills are also referred to in *Chevrefoil*, where the "nuvel lai" [new lay] is composed by Tristram, "ki bien saveit harper" [who was a skilful harpist] (vv. 112–13).¹⁷

II. Male characters and the theme of chivalry

One of the constant features of all 23 lays is that the principal characters are *chevaliers*. In most cases the protagonist has been dubbed a knight before the action commences, but in *Espine* (vv. 140–48) and *Tyolet* (vv. 263–66) the youths are knighted during the course of the narrative (vv. 140–48), as is the son in the father-son stories (*Yonec*, *Milun*, *Doon*, *Tydorel*). In the *Deus Amanz*, the young lover, called an *enfant* (v. 3), seems not to have been old enough to be knighted before

¹⁷ For further discussion of the prologues and epilogues, see Carlos Alvar, "A propósito del marco de los lays narrativos," in *Miscellanea mediaevalia: mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard*, ed. Jean-Claude Faucon, Alain Labbé, and Daniel Quérueu, (Nouvelle Bibliothèque du Moyen Âge) 46, 2 vols (Paris, 1998), 1:14–31.

his ill-fated ascent of the mountain.¹⁸ The lady in *Chaitivel* has four chivalric suitors, and in *Equitan* both the king, who “maintint chevalerie” [upheld the principles of chivalry] (v. 16), and the seneschal, a “bon chevaler pruz e leal” [good knight, brave and loyal] (v. 16), are central to the story. In *Lecheor* the knights (v. 41) present at the festival of Saint Pantelion (v. 41) participate in the action, but the conclusions reached with regard to masculine behavior target *chevaliers* as a whole (vv. 63, 69, 113). A number of lays contain references to knights other than the main protagonists (e.g. the Arthurian knights in *Lanval* and *Tyolet*, the participants in the tournament in *Chaitivel*, and those who do battle with the youth in *Espine*).

Marie and the anonymous authors make it clear to the reader/listener that their heroes possess the necessary skills for success on the battlefield. Knights possess *proesce* and/or *valor*, and they are *proz*, *corageus*, *enprenant*, *fier*, *hardi*, or *vaillant*. *Tydorel* is the only lay to use the term *chevaleros* to describe knights (v. 140). Knights can be said to be “de grant chevalerie” [of great chivalry / great courage] (*Melion*, v. 9), or they are able to *fere chevalerie* [perform acts of chivalry] (*Desiré*, v. 248). They are often praised for their generosity (*despendant*, *large*) or their learning and wisdom (*engignos*, *enseigniez*, *sage*, *senez*), and they are invariably handsome (*bel* and *beuté* are frequently used, as is *gent*) and pleasing to look at (*avenant*). In *Tydorel* the queen is entranced by the beauty and appearance of the knight who approaches during her husband’s absence (v. 70, cf. vv. 383–86); he is the most

¹⁸ Guigemar is dubbed by the king of Brittany (“Armes li dune a sun talent,” v. 48) and Yonec by his parents (“A chevaler l’unt [a]dubez,” v. 464). Sanz Per is dubbed in Northumberland by his aunt (“‘Chevals e armes me dona,” *Milun*, v. 457), *Desiré* by the king of Scotland (“Li rois l’ama et tint molt chier, / Puis l’adouba a chevalier,” vv. 67–68) and Doon’s son by the king of France (“En France fu si longuement / Que li rois en fist chevalier,” vv. 204–05). The youth in *Espine* is dubbed by his father (“‘Sire,’ fet il, ‘je quier .I. don. / ... / Que vos me faciez chevalier,” vv. 140, 142) and *Tyolet* by his mother, using his father’s arms (“Totes les armes qu’ele a / Isnelement li aporta, / Qui son seignor orent esté. / Molt en a bien son f[i]lz armé,” vv. 263–66). Normal usage is for little more than a brief indication of the act of dubbing (*adouber*, *armer*, *armes doner*, *faire chevalier*), but in *Desiré*, when the hero’s son is dubbed in Scotland, we get an idea of what the possibilities were for such a ceremony. Here the king girds on the sword and gives the youth the accolade. Then the kings of Murray and Lothian, on their knees, fix his spurs on him (vv. 783–90). As we have seen, dubbing often takes place outside the boy’s home and often by a king, but it can be done by the boy’s father, mother, or aunt. *Milun*’s son seems to be aged over 20 when he is dubbed (v. 279), but dubbing generally takes place when the boy has sufficient *sens* (*Guigemar*, v. 46, *Yonec*, v. 463) or when the circumstances warrant it (*Espine*, vv. 141–45).

handsome man on earth (v. 84). In her description of him to her son, she adds: "Tant le vi bel et avenant, / Et si cortois et si parlant" [I saw he was so handsome and comely, and so courtly and eloquent] (vv. 397-98). Tydorel inherits this beauty (vv. 116-17). A knight's social virtues are conveyed by the adjectives *cortois* and *franc*. We are sometimes told that they are of good birth (*bien emparentez, debonere, gentil*). The knights enjoy a good reputation (*alosez, mut coneüz, grant pris, proisie*) and are loved by their lord and their neighbors (e.g. "Mult se faseit amer de tuz," *Guigemar*, v. 44; "E de tuz ses veisins amez," *Bisclavret*, v. 20; "Et molt se fet amer de touz," *Graelent*, v. 38; "Et amer se faisoit a tos," *Melion*, v. 8).

Marie and other authors like to use a cluster of adjectives together to describe their heroes. In *Eliduc* Marie introduces Eliduc with the comment that "en Bretagne ot un chevalier / Pruz e curteis, hardi e fier" [In Brittany there was a knight, brave and courtly, bold and fierce] (vv. 5-6). Similarly, Doon is a knight "qui molt estoit preuz et vaillanz, / Sage et cortois et enprenanz" [who was very brave and valiant, wise and courtly and daring] (vv. 69-70). It is said about Tydorel that no one was ever "tant preu, tant cortois, tant vaillant, / Tant large, ne tant despendant" [so brave, so courtly, so valiant, so generous or so liberal] (vv. 223-24, cf. vv. 452-58). The lay of *Tyolet* is about a "vallet bel et engingnos, / Hardi et fier et coragos" [youth who is handsome and clever, bold, fierce and courageous] (vv. 39-40).

As we are dealing with short narratives, there are no lengthy descriptions of knights, such as we find in romance, but we can note:

Mut par esteit bons chevaliers
 Francs [e] hardiz, curteis e fiers,
 Mut fu coneüz en Irlande. (*Milun*, vv. 13-15)

[He was a very good knight, noble and bold, courtly and fierce, and he was very well known in Ireland]

Mes mut erent de grant beauté
 E chevalers pruz e vaillanz,
 Larges, curteis e despendanz;
 Mur [par] esteint de grant pris,
 E gentiz hummes del país. (*Chaitivel*, vv. 36-40)

[But they were exceedingly handsome, and brave and valiant knights, generous, courtly and liberal; they were held in very high esteem and were noblemen of that region]

.I. sien neveu avoit li rois,
 Qui molt fu sages et cortois;
 Guingamor esteit apelez,
 Chevalier ert, preuz et senez.
 Por sa valor, por sa biauté,
 Li rois le tint en grant chierté. (*Guingamor*, vv. 9–14)

[The king had a nephew, who was very wise and courtly; his name was Guingamor and he was a brave and wise knight. Because of his valor and his beauty, the king held him in great affection]

These well-trained knights, endowed with a wide range of skills and positive attributes, appear in the lays more as lovers than as warriors, but their chivalric activities make an important contribution to the structure of the poems.

(a) *Tournaments and war*

Once they have been dubbed, the young knights set off in search of fame. Guigemar goes to Flanders “pur sun pris quere” [in search of renown] (v. 51), and the young man in *Espine* wishes to be dubbed in order to seek fame abroad: “Car voil aler en autre terre / En soudees por mon pris querre” [For I wish to go to another land as a mercenary in search of renown] (vv. 143–44). The best way for a newly dubbed knight to test his skills and acquire fame is by participating in tournaments. Doon’s son goes in search of tournaments, seeking fame far and wide (vv. 206–07). From his home in Northumberland Milun’s son heads straight for Brittany, where he participates in tournaments (v. 323). Tournaments offered an opportunity to demonstrate not only military skills but also social qualities such as generosity and concern for others: “Mut turnëot e despendeit” [he attended many tournaments and spent freely] (the *bachelor* in *Laüstic*, v. 21); “La despendi e turneia” [there he spent freely and attended tournaments] (Sanz Per in *Milun*, v. 323). Desiré’s beloved tells him that she has no regard for a knight who does not attend tournaments frequently (vv. 245–46). They were also enjoyable experiences: “Por qoi aimment a tornoier?” [Why do they love tournaments?], asks the lady in *Lecheor* in her observations on the behavior of knights (v. 70).

In *Chaitivel* the tournament is central to the transition from four knights to one. At nightfall, after a successful day’s jousting, the four lovers are foolish enough, says Marie, to stray far from their own companions; three are killed by a lateral attack and one apparently emasculated (vv. 111–26). In *Milun* and *Doon*, the tournaments, which like

that in *Chaitivel* take place in Brittany, allow fathers to be reunited with sons (*Milun*, vv. 387–464, *Doon*, vv. 214–74) and the families to live happily ever after (“En grant bien e en [grant] duçur / Vesquirent puis e nuit e jur” [Afterwards they lived night and day in great happiness and great tenderness] (*Milun*, vv. 531–32); “Puis vesquirent a grant honor” [Afterwards they lived together in great honor] (*Doon*, v. 280).

Tournaments were in many ways training for war. *Milun* tells his son that he had visited many lands in search of tournaments and wars (vv. 441–42). *Guigemar* shows how the former could become the latter without much difficulty. Meriaduc, who is holding Guigemar’s beloved, proclaims a tournament against his enemy, knowing that Guigemar will come (vv. 743–48). Guigemar uses the would-be participants in the tournament to wage war on Meriaduc; they succeed in killing him and destroying his castle (vv. 857–80). But the only other poem in Marie’s collection to contain any elaboration of the theme of war is *Eliduc*. Exiled from Brittany, in spite of his successes as a knight, Eliduc travels to England in search of *soudees* [paid military service]. England is a war-torn country (“Plusurs reis [i] ot en la tere, / Entre eus eurent estrif e guere” [There were many kings in the land, and between them there was strife and warfare], vv. 89–90, cf. *Guigemar*, v. 52), and Eliduc is delighted that he has “found” a war (v. 105). Marie also needs a device whereby, although happily married, Eliduc will meet the maiden whose love will bring him joy and sorrow and also transform the remaining part of the narrative. Marie does not show much interest in the battle itself, which is recounted briefly (vv. 213–17), but she does deal at some length with the background to it (vv. 90–212).

The lengthiest account of a war in the anonymous lays occurs in *Desiré* (MS S, vv. 271–98).¹⁹ *Desiré* accompanies the king of Scotland to a war a great distance away and engages in a one-to-one joust with the king’s principal opponent. Having defeated him, he hands him over to the king. As often happens, wars serve to enhance the ruler’s grip over his community and to raise the hero’s reputation as a knight. Graellent is summoned to court by the king of Brittany, who is waging a great war against his neighbors (vv. 16–18). But the reputation he acquires by inflicting harm on the king’s enemies brings him to the

¹⁹ In MS P, printed by Tobin, the passage is much shorter (vv. 259–62).

attention of the queen, and the plot can therefore progress. More positively, in *Espine* the young hero demonstrates his prowess, and thus his fitness to marry his beloved, in a series of one-to-one combats at the Hawthorn Ford that constitute the longest chivalric episode in the 23 lays under discussion (vv. 304–448).

(b) *Riding and hunting*

During the course of their upbringing, boys are taught to ride, to hunt, and to go hawking by the river (*riviere*). Doon's mother looks after her son until he can ride a horse and go hunting and hawking ("chevauchier, / Aler em bois et rivoier," vv. 193–94). Desiré's parents send him to the king of Scotland to learn hunting and hawking: "De bois et de riviere aprist" (v. 65). Lanval, Desiré, Graellent, and Lorois in *Trot* all undergo their personal adventure when they go riding: "Un jur munta sur sun destrer, / Si s'est alez esbaneer" [One day he mounted his warhorse and set off in search of relaxation] (*Lanval*, vv. 41–42); "Por soi deduire velt monter. / Son bon cheval fet amener" [In order to enjoy himself he wanted to go riding. He had his good horse brought out] (*Desiré*, vv. 105–06); "La hors m'iré esbanoier" [I shall go out for some relaxation] (*Graellent*, v. 189; cf. *Trot*, vv. 24, 43–45). Similarly, Guigemar's life is changed as a result of his desire to go hunting for pleasure: "Talent li prist d'aler chacier... Al matin vait en la forest, / Kar cel deduit forment li plect" [He wanted to go hunting... In the morning he entered the forest, for this sport was very pleasing to him] (vv. 76, 79–80). King Equitan is rarely deflected from his love of hunting and hawking ("Pur nul busuin ki li creüst / Li reis ne laissast sun chacier, / Sun deduire, sun riveier" [Not for any crisis which arose would the king abandon his hunting, his sport or his hawking], vv. 26–28), and he uses hunting as a device to meet the seneschal's wife ("Priveement esbanier / En la cuntree ala chacier" [For his personal pleasure he went hunting in that region], vv. 43–44). Later in *Equitan* the narrative is brought to a conclusion as a result of the lovers' intention to murder the seneschal during a further hunting expedition: "El païs vet chacier li reis" [The king goes hunting in the region] (v. 264). Hunting is of great importance in *Bisclavret*, as the king's hunting expedition provides Marie with a means of rescuing Bisclavret from his permanent state as a wolf (vv. 135–36), and it is during a similar expedition that Bisclavret encounters his wife and bites off her nose (vv. 219–21). Arthur's queen in *Lanval* attempts to

seduce Lanval while her husband is out hunting, and she makes her accusations against him when he returns from the forest (vv. 311–12). In *Yonec* the lady's lover Muldumarec comes to her while her husband is away hunting (vv. 53–54), and the latter pretends to go hunting in order to trick her into summoning her lover, who is duly killed by the iron spikes placed on the lady's window (vv. 298–99).

Hunting is also a favorite theme of the authors of the anonymous lays, but in these stories it tends to be linked to the *merveilleux* (see below). In *Tydorel* the lady's supernatural lover comes to her while her husband is absent on a hunting trip (vv. 21–22, 365–66). Similarly, in *Guingamor* the queen is first attracted to the hero while her husband is away hunting (vv. 23–24), and later that day she proposes a hunt for the white boar (vv. 155–60), which will duly lead him to the *fée* he will love. Guingamor sees this as an opportunity to acquire “grant pris” [great renown] (v. 350); he does return with the boar's head, but more than three hundred years after the death of the king. Hunting is fundamental to the structure of *Tyolet*. It provides food for Tyolet and his mother and leads to the encounter with the “chevalier-beste” [knight-beast] (vv. 190, 205, 218, 231, 268). In the second part it is instrumental in the acquisition of a wife and a kingdom. In *Melion* King Arthur gives the hero a castle with adjoining forests and rivers (vv. 57–58). It is when Melion is out hunting (“Un jor estoit alé chacier” [One day he had gone out hunting], v. 71) that he meets the woman he will marry (vv. 84–129). Three years later his life is transformed during a hunt (“Un jor en la forest ala” [One day he went into the forest], v. 133). To satisfy his wife's desire for the meat of a “molt grant cerf” [very large stag] (v. 144), he becomes a wolf. Later, having gone hunting as a wolf, he himself is hunted in his turn and only just escapes with his life (vv. 299–312).

Although individual knights can be guilty of undesirable or foolish behavior (especially in *Chaitivel*), Marie de France presents a fundamentally positive view of chivalry. In lays in which chivalric activity is dealt with at some length, prowess can rescue a damsel in distress (*Guigemar*), create reputations, bring fathers and sons together (*Milun*), and come to the aid of endangered communities (*Eliduc*). This is largely the case with the anonymous authors (*Desiré*, *Doon*, *Espine*, *Guingamor*, etc.). But in *Tyolet* we are told (vv. 6–14) that most modern knights are inferior to those of King Arthur, who were very bold and fierce (*molt...hardiz et fiers*), powerful (*puissant*), and very generous (*li plus despendant*). Yet, the “chevalier-beste,” seemingly

one of Arthur's knights, defines a knight first as a beast that is "much dreaded" because it "captures and eats other beasts" ("molt cremue; / Autres bestes prent et menjue," vv. 141–42), then as one that "deceives and kills others" ("Autre engingne et autre tue," v. 236). This view is echoed by Tyolet's mother, who describes a knight as a beast that "captures and devours many another" ("mainte autre prent et menjue," v. 256). Tyolet regards Arthur's court as a place where he can learn "chevalerie" (v. 304), but the Arthurian knights who participate in the hunt for the white foot lack the extra dimension of valor that would bring them the prize of the princess's hand in marriage (vv. 384–92, 411–14). Even worse is the knight who attacks the injured Tyolet and leaves him for dead, before journeying to Arthur's court to claim that he had cut off the white foot. However, between them Gauvain, who acts as a model of chivalry, and Tyolet restore one's faith in chivalric values and create an ending in which justice prevails.²⁰

III. *Female characters and the theme of love*

It comes as no surprise that most of the 13 female lovers in Marie's lays (*Eliduc* has two) are described as beautiful: e.g. *Guigemar*, v. 212, *Equitan*, vv. 31, 52, *Le Fresne*, v. 237, *Lanval*, vv. 72, 117. Marie twice emphasizes that this beauty was formed by Nature (*Equitan*, v. 34, *Le Fresne*, v. 236). The term *gent*, which conveys nobility and beauty, is used to describe the ladies in *Equitan* (v. 33), *Lanval* (vv. 100, 563), and *Yonec* (v. 25). Like their male counterparts, if less frequently, the ladies are said to be *proz* [worthy] (*Le Fresne*, v. 482, *Lanval*, v. 72, *Deus Amanz*, v. 228, Guildelüec in *Eliduc*, v. 710). In a knight this adjective tends to convey valor, as the core notion of a man's worth is conveyed principally through his military skills, but a "worthy" woman possesses wisdom, nobility of mind, and a general understanding of her role in society. Similar to this is the application of the adjective *vaillant* to the lady in *Bisclavret* (v. 21) and use of the noun *valur* to designate a quality exhibited by the lady in *Chaitivel* (v. 31). Guildelüec is described as *noble* (*Eliduc*, v. 9), which refers to general excellence rather than to noble birth (see *Guigemar*, v. 60, and *Lanval*, v. 321). But noble birth

²⁰ The maiden at court in *Espine* infers that the knights present are too cowardly to attempt the adventure of the Hawthorn Ford (vv. 190–92), and the queen in *Guingamor* suggests that no knight at court would dare to enter the forest and hunt the white boar for a thousand pounds in gold (vv. 155–60).

is certainly mentioned, through the phrases *de haut parage* (Guigemar, vv. 211, 341, *Lanval*, v. 27), *de grant parage* (Guigemar, v. 710, *Eliduc*, v. 10) and *de haute gent* (*Le Fresne*, v. 210, *Yonec*, v. 21, *Eliduc*, vv. 10, 389). Eight of Marie's ladies are also *sage* (Guigemar, v. 212, *Equitan*, v. 51, *Le Fresne*, vv. 254, 482, *Lanval*, v. 72, *Deus Amanz*, v. 228, *Yonec*, v. 22, *Laüstic*, v. 14, *Eliduc*, vv. 9, 710). The lady in *Chaitivel* refers to the ideal woman as being "bele," "pruz," and "sage" (v. 196), and Guigemar's beloved is "franche, curteise, bele e sage" (v. 212). *Le Fresne* is "bele," "curteise," "franche," and "de bone escolle" (vv. 237–39); she is excellent both in her appearance (*semblant*) and her speech (*parole*, v. 240). The lady in *Laüstic* is "sage, curteise e acemee" (v. 14).

Leaving aside for the moment those who are clearly presented as *fées*, the lady in *Doon* is "a merveille cortoise e bele" [exceedingly courtly and beautiful] (v. 10), and her counterpart in *Espine* is "sage et cortoise" [wise and courtly] and "gente et bele" [noble and beautiful] (vv. 23–24). The ladies at the festival of Saint Pantelion in *Lecheor* are "les plus nobles et les plus beles" [the most noble and the most beautiful] in the land (v. 5, cf. v. 45), and the group who work on the new lay are "sages...et ensaingnies, / Franches, cortoises et proisies" [wise...well bred, noble, courtly, and esteemed] (vv. 55–56). They are further described as "de Breitaingne la flors, / Et la proesce et la valors" [the flower of Brittany, its finest and most worthy women] (vv. 57–58). Nabaret's wife is "noble, curteise, bele e gente" [noble, courtly, beautiful, and comely] and also "de mult haut parage" [of very high lineage] (vv. 6–7). The contented ladies in *Trot* are "cortoises," "beles," and "acesmees" [courtly, beautiful, and elegant] (vv. 80–81), and the queen in *Tydorel* is possessed of beauty and nobility (v. 9). The author of *Tyolet* states that no one could find anyone more beautiful than the princess of Logres, who is more beautiful than Dido or Helen (vv. 324–26). When Tyolet marries her, the poet adds, echoing *Lanval*, vv. 94–96, that "fleur de lis [ou] rose novele, / Quant primes nest el tans d'esté, / Trespassoit ele de biauté" [the lily or a new rose, when it first blooms in summertime, did she surpass in beauty] (vv. 696–98).

As in the case of their knights, the authors predictably do not indulge in lengthy descriptions. One of the longest is found in *Equitan*:

La dame ert bele durement
 E de mut bon affeitement,
 Gent cors out e bele faiture;
 En li former uvrat nature:
 Les oilz out veirs e bel le vis,
 Bele buche, neis ben asis. (vv. 31–36, cf. vv. 51–53)

[The lady was very beautiful and of very fine breeding, and she had an elegant body with a good bearing. Nature had striven hard to fashion her; her eyes sparkled, her face and mouth were beautiful and her nose was well set]

The lady in *Lanval* is a special case. Her beauty constitutes a key theme in the narrative.²¹ When she arrives at Arthur's court, we are told that:

Le cors ot gent, basse la hanche,
 Le col plus blanc que neif sur branche,
 Les oilz ot vairs e blanc le vis,
 Bele buche, neis bien asis,
 Le surcilz bruns e bel le frunt
 E le chef cresp e aukes blunt. (vv. 563–68)

[Her body was elegant, her hips low, and her neck whiter than snow on a branch; her eyes sparkled and her face was white, her mouth fair and her nose well set; her eyebrows were brown and her brow fair, and her hair was curly and rather blond]

The lady in *Melion*, dressed in scarlet silk with an ermine cloak around her shoulders (vv. 87–89), is described as follows:

Gent cors et bele espauleüre,
 Et blonde la cheveleüre,
 Petite bouche bien mollee
 E comme rose encoloree;
 Les ex ot vairs, clers et rians:
 Molt estoit bele en tos samblans. (vv. 91–96)

[An elegant body, fine shoulders, and blonde hair, and a small, nicely shaped mouth, the color of a rose; her eyes were sparkling, bright, and laughing. Her whole appearance was very beautiful]

Three of the ladies in the anonymous lays are *fées*. In *Desiré* the lady's handmaiden asks the hero if he has ever seen such a beautiful countenance, such beautiful hands and arms, such an attractive body, or such beautiful, more finely textured or better plaited hair; Venus herself was not more beautiful (vv. 188–91, 197–99). Graelent's lady is "bele et eschevie, / Blanche, rovente et colorie" [beautiful and slender, fair-skinned, pink and fresh-complexioned] with "eulz rianz" [laughing eyes] and a beautiful brow [bel le front] (vv. 229–31). Graelent later tells her she has an elegant body ("gent cors," v. 266). Guingamor's

²¹ See my *Text and Context*, pp. 122–25.

beloved has “biaus membres . . . et lons et plains” [beautiful limbs . . . long and smooth] (v. 430). She too is compared to a lily (*fleur de liz*) and a rose (*flor de rose*, v. 434, see *Eliduc*, v. 1012). When she arrives at court during Graellent’s trial, she is said to have a “douz semblant,” a “douce chiere,” “biaus eulz,” a “biau vis,” and a “bele façon” [gentle appearance, gentle expression, beautiful eyes, beautiful face, and beautiful features] (vv. 618–19). All in all, there seems no appreciable difference in the way Marie and the anonymous authors describe the most important ladies in their stories. But what is of supreme importance is the status of these ladies as lovers.

The theme of love

It is commonly stated that one of the principal differences between the *Lais* of Marie de France and the anonymous lays lies in the treatment of love. As they are less well known, I shall begin by examining what anonymous lays say about the love affairs they recount. With the exception of *Graelent*, these lays offer little information about the nature of love itself. Early in the narrative, Graellent is faced with the amorous attentions of his queen, who has fallen in love with him (“En son corage l’aama” [In her heart she fell in love with him], v. 31) and is puzzled that he does not seek her “druerie” [love] (v. 78). He needs to react quickly and present an argument that will convince her of their incompatibility as lovers, and thus allow him to escape her clutches. In the longest passage on love in the 23 lays (vv. 83–116), he tells her that loving is no laughing matter and that a lover must be of very great worth. Many foolish people, he says, harm love by speaking about it without the slightest knowledge of it. Love demands chastity in deed, word, and thought. If one lover is loyal and the other fickle and false, then the love will be corrupted and short-lived. True love is shared; it passes from body to body and heart to heart. Graellent then cites Cicero, who stated (in his *De amicitia*) that what a lover wants so should his beloved. If one lover contradicts the other, there is very little true love. Finding love is easy, but keeping it properly requires sense, tenderness (*douceur*), openness (*franchise*), and prudence (*sens*). Love hates any form of wrongdoing (*forfet*), and loyalty must be promised and upheld. Graellent concludes by telling the queen that for these reasons he does not wish to get involved with love.

Comments of a general nature also occur in *Desiré*. Here the hero’s beloved—who, like the maiden Graellent will eventually meet, is from the Other World—defines a man’s obligations when he is in love: he

must continue to perform deeds of valor, attend tournaments regularly, spend lavishly, and entertain well (vv. 245–50). In other words, a knight's career, military and social, must not be sacrificed to his emotional life, as the latter would be compromised by any lowering of standards. The incomparably beautiful *fée* offers Desiré an abundance of gold and silver (vv. 155–64), but like Graelent he has to juggle reality and idealism. In his case this includes the spiritual side of his life, and like Graelent he ends up opting for the harmony of the Other World as the place where he can enjoy his beloved in untrammelled fashion. If knights or ladies feel uneasy about the power of love, and are tempted to shun it, the lay of *Trot* insists on their obligation to love, sincerely and honorably. In this lay the principal character Lorois is not himself involved in a love relationship, but a series of encounters with riders who are either trotting painfully or ambling joyfully teaches him a lesson he immediately passes on to the ladies at court: those who fail in their obligation to love will pay dearly for their pride and arrogance, whereas those who serve love loyally will be rewarded accordingly (vv. 237–70).

In *Doon* the first sign of emotion appears when Doon indicates his intention to leave his new wife: she weeps and begs for mercy tenderly (vv. 167–70). At this stage the text refers to him as her *ami* (v. 168). Later, when his son takes him back to Edinburgh, we are told not only that the lady loved her husband very much and desired him greatly (“Qui molt l’amot / Et durement le desirrot,” v. 278) but also that he loved her and that his love had been the stimulus for his original journeys. The lay is said to be about the “jornees qu’il erra / Por la dame que il ama” [the journeys he made for the lady he loved] (vv. 283–84). Whatever her initial feelings for Doon, the lady waits for his return with a loyalty reminiscent of that shown by the lady in Marie de France’s *Milun*, in which the love relationship is, from the outset, clearly based on love.

Espine charts the development of love and sexuality from infancy to marriage. Here the children fall in love when playing together. They share all their experiences and do everything together, but they have no desire to sleep together. Sexual love only comes into their lives when Nature can tolerate it. However, they fail to conceal their love and are discovered (vv. 29–66). The grief-stricken youth sees the resulting separation as a misfortune and a catastrophe (*pechié*, v. 121), claiming that he will not be able to live without his beloved (vv. 119–24). The girl is distraught in learning that he is going to risk the adventure of

the Hawthorn Ford, and she prays for his safety; only a true lover, she states, could understand her grief (vv. 243–50). She watches his combats with great anxiety for his well-being and even begs his opponent for mercy. On returning home, he takes her as his wife (v. 498). Harmony here seems to be a product of the prowess of the male and the commitment and support of the female, whose prayers are inspired by fear for his safety (vv. 232–33, 459–62).

We have seen that to the amorous advances of his unscrupulous superior Graellent opposes his vision of perfection in love, a vision that had hitherto led to his rejection of the local maidens, of which he could apparently have had his pick (vv. 12–13). Having been reduced to poverty by the queen's spiteful intervention with regard to his military pay, he comes to love a *fée*, whom he encounters when she is bathing in a spring (vv. 218–26). His initial act is to seize her clothing in order to prevent her from escaping. Eventually, after some heated exchanges between them, repeated requests on Graellent's part for her love, and his apparent act of rape ("A fet de lui ce qu'il li plect" [He did with her what he pleased], v. 296), she bestows her love on him: "Je vos aim enterinement" [I love you most sincerely] (v. 315). During the remainder of the narrative, Graellent is caught between, on the one hand, his beloved's imposition on him of secrecy with regard to their love (vv. 316–18) and the mixture of compassion and cruelty with which she treats him, and on the other hand the inadequacy and hostility of a court in which telling the truth almost costs him his liberty (vv. 499–501). Throughout the narrative Graellent struggles to match his ideals to reality and to be in control of his life (even when he takes the *fée* by force, this may have been a set-up on her part).²² His vulnerability is symbolized by his inability to cope with the current of the river that separates his homeland from that of his beloved (vv. 701–32): when rescued, he is close to drowning. In the real world happiness, truth, and justice are fragile entities.

Guingamor also has no particular interest in love ("Ne quier ouan d'amor overer" [I do not care at present to labor for love], v. 86; see also v. 496). He too encounters a predatory queen, and later, as he pursues the white boar, he also comes across an outstandingly beautiful *fée*, who is being bathed in a spring by her handmaiden (vv. 425–35).

²² On the textual and interpretive issues relating to the "rape" scene, see Burgess and Brook, pp. 365–66.

Unwilling to abandon the hunt for the boar and the fame that would accrue from its capture, he hides the maiden's clothes, intending to return to her when he can. But she reproaches him, offers him hospitality, and tells him she will deliver the boar and his hunting hound to him. Accepting this, and troubled for the first time in his life by love, he begs her for her love, to which she replies that she will gladly love him; he soon kisses and embraces her (vv. 494–502). But the *fée* thereafter seems to show little interest in him, and one wonders whether her intention is merely to add him to the collection of the ten lost knights from his uncle's court, with whom he is re-united at her castle (vv. 519–21). Unlike Graellent, he does succeed in imposing himself on the court; when he returns three hundred years later, he is still remembered as the extremely brave knight ("merveilles preu," v. 606) who hunted the boar and never returned. His fame increases when the boar's head is taken to court by the charcoal-burner; it is displayed by the king at many a festival in order to keep Guingamor's story alive (vv. 673–75).

At the outset, Melion has an image of the purity of love in his mind. He vows never to love a maiden, no matter how noble or beautiful, who has ever loved another man or even spoken of one (vv. 19–21). When the daughter of the king of Ireland comes to him as he is out hunting, she tells him that she had heard him praised, had never desired to love any other man, and would never love anyone else (vv. 111–16). Although there is no mention of Melion's love for her, his ideal of perfection is now satisfied, but he too will discover that perfection and love are incompatible in the real world, and he ends up cursing women in general (vv. 588–90). The woman's desire for meat from a stag she has seen forces him to reveal a secret, his ability to transform himself when necessary into a wolf, a disclosure that exposes his vulnerability and nearly costs him his life.²³

In *Tydorel* the queen's lover informs her that he has come for her, stating that he loves and desires her greatly (vv. 58–59). He asks her if she could love him with the sort of love he seeks from her, adding that she should not make him entreat her for long and that he will love her loyally; if he leaves, he says, she will never know joy (vv. 60–68). The

²³ After the princess has told Melion that she loves him (vv. 111–12), there is no further mention of love. But some readers consider that she takes Melion's squire with her to Ireland because she has fallen in love with him (vv. 191–93).

lady looks at him and falls “angoisseusement” [passionately / violently] in love with him because of his “semblant” and “biauté” [appearance and beauty] (vv. 69–71). She agrees to love him on the understanding that he tells her his name and where he comes from (vv. 58–74). He duly takes her to his domain beneath the lake and prophesies that they will love each other for a long time. On returning to her garden with her, he has his way with her (“toute sa volenté en fist,” v. 152). There is no further mention of love until Tydorel’s mother explains the circumstances of how she met and fell in love with his father (vv. 381–474). Tydorel himself does not love, but he is the victim of his parents’ love; his own mother keeps his identity secret, and it is only when the young goldsmith’s mother, out of love for her own son, unlocks the secret that he finally has control over his own destiny.

Tyolet marries the maiden who arrives at Arthur’s court and promises to grant her *amistié* to, and take as her husband, the man who can bring her the white foot of the large and handsome stag that is guarded by seven lions (vv. 351–56). However, there is no mention of love between her and Tyolet. Marriage to a beautiful heiress and the consequent lordship of her territory seem to be an outcome for which Tyolet is destined. He has less trouble with the opposite sex than most of the heroes in the anonymous lays. His outstanding career development is aided by four women: the *fée* who taught him to whistle (vv. 42–46), his mother who gives him his father’s armor (vv. 263–64), the maiden who takes him to a doctor when he is injured (vv. 559–61), and his future wife who provides him with a hunting hound that leads him to the stag and ultimately to happiness (vv. 369–70, 430–31).

Nabaret revolves around a marital squabble, but it contains no reference to love. The man is controlled by the sharpness of his wife’s tongue. In *Lecheor* love as a motivating force for knights takes second place to the sex act. The normal subject-matter for the annual composition of lays, i.e. love, passion, and noble deeds (*amors*, *drueries*, and *nobles chevaleries*, vv. 15–16), is transformed into a diagnosis of chivalric aspirations and focus. All good deeds, we are told, are performed for the lady’s *con* [cunt] (“Tuit li bien sont fet por lui,” v. 95). Thus power is neatly transferred from man to woman, as the female body controls all knightly activities.

In two of Marie’s lays, *Guigemar* and *Equitan*, we are told what love is and what it is not. *Guigemar* informs us that it is an invisible wound and a long-lasting ill (*mal*) because its source lies in Nature. Many people joke about it, especially ignoble courtiers (*vilain curteis*) who go

around the world philandering and boasting of their conquests. This is foolishness, wickedness, and debauchery (*lecherie*) rather than genuine love. A loyal lover should be served, loved, and obeyed (vv. 483–95). A little earlier in this lay, in the passage in which Venus is depicted as burning Ovid's book, Marie states that love should be observed with loyalty and good service (vv. 237–38). In *Equitan* the seneschal's wife tells the king that love is only honorable if it is based on equality; a poor man who is loyal, wise, and worthy is greatly to be preferred, and his love creates greater joy than that of the prince or king who lacks loyalty. It is dangerous, she adds, to place love on a higher level than is appropriate for one's status in life. Powerful men think they have control over women (vv. 137–48).

For Marie, love seems to be based on loyalty, sincerity, and equality. She rejects the contemporary concept of marriage, which is too closely linked to the feudal and economic realities of life; here a woman is merely a pawn in a man's world (although she does often allow the man to have the last word in a relationship).²⁴ Nor does the courtly ideology of *fin'amor* satisfy Marie; wherever possible, she wants her lovers to marry and to devote themselves to each other with identical commitment. She favors for her stories the figure of the *mal mariée*, who finds no love within her marriage and is ready to welcome it when the right man comes along (*Guigemar*, *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, *Milun*, *Chevrefoil*). Her married women grant their bodies along with their love to the man of their choice. In *Guigemar* she calls sexual relations the "surplus" and states that the lovers have every right to enjoy something that others enjoy (vv. 531–54, cf. also *Equitan*, vv. 179–80, *Bisclavret*, v. 115, *Yonec*, v. 191). This had led Jean Flori to categorize Marie's concept of love as innovatory and subversive, as it is in opposition both to the teachings of the Church and to the power structure of contemporary society.²⁵

For Marie, more so than for the anonymous authors, love has a strong social context; it is linked to power, rank, and wealth. She knows that love can be dangerous for a woman. Men can use their authority ("amer par seignurie," *Equitan*, v. 148) to get what they want from women and then discard them. This is what happens to Le Fresne, who

²⁴ See Heather Arden, "The End Game in Marie de France's *Lais*," *Dalhousie French Studies* 61 (2002), 3–11.

²⁵ Jean Flori, "Littérature et société au XII^e siècle: mariage, amour et courtoisie dans les *Lais* de Marie de France," *Bien Dire et Bien Apprendre* 8 (1990), 71–98.

is set aside when a better long-term prospect, a woman with the requisite social standing, is found for her lover Gurun (he is told to marry a “gentil femme” / [noble woman], v. 317, who can produce legitimate heirs). Marie’s wives have reason to fear angry husbands: the lady in *Laüstic* merely has the corpse of a nightingale thrown at her (vv. 117–19), but her equivalent in *Yonec* fears for her life (“S’a lui revois, il me ocira” [If I go back to him, he will kill me], v. 413). Nevertheless, the wives have no hesitation in committing adultery if the opportunity arises. The passage from *Equitan*, cited above, shows that Marie has in her mind the concept of “amur pruz” [honorable / worthy love], v. 137; only once does she use the adjective *fine* with *amur* (*Chevrefoil*, v. 8), which is based on loyalty, honorable conduct, and equality.²⁶ In *Guigemar* she has the hero tell his lady that a well-intentioned woman, if she has *valur* [worth] and *sens* [wisdom], should shun fickleness and cruelty towards him and enjoy his love at once; this will be to their advantage (vv. 515–26). In *Chaitivel* Marie states that a woman must honor, cherish, and serve her suitors, be grateful for their attentions and speak to them in kindly fashion (vv. 24–28, cf. *Guigemar*, vv. 493–95). In general, Marie seems to have had an image of noble courtiers (“fin curteis,” *Equitan*, v. 151) who have a true understanding of love, as opposed to boastful philanderers (“vilain curteis,” *Guigemar*, v. 488) or mercenary burgesses (“burgeis,” *Equitan*, v. 152) who assess things only according to their monetary value. But Marie knows that love is such a powerful force that it drives people to risk their lives, e.g. the youth in *Deus Amanz* who refuses to drink his potion and dies on the top of the mountain (v. 204), the four suitors in *Chaitivel* who in order to impress their lady commit an act of folly (“Trop folement s’abaundonerent” [very foolishly they exposed themselves to danger], v. 119) that costs three of them their lives and leaves one emasculated, and Tristram in *Chevrefoil* who risks death and destruction (“se mist en abandun / De mort et de destructiun,” vv. 19–20) in order to spend a few joyful moments with his beloved. This abandonment of caution and common sense in favor of recklessness and risk-taking affects a large number of Marie’s lovers (the lady in *Guigemar*, *Laüstic*, and *Yonec*, the lovers in *Equitan*, *Eliduc*, etc.).

²⁶ Verse 137 of *Equitan* (“Amur n’est pruz se n’est egals”) can be compared to v. 99 of *Graelent* (“Amor n’est preuz sanz compaignon”).

There is no equivalent in the anonymous lays to Marie's interest in the visible effects love has on its victims. The latter express their emotions through sighing (*Guigemar*, vv. 384, 407, 412, 443, 632, 782, *Equitan*, v. 89, *Lanval*, vv. 341, 594), trembling limbs (*Guigemar*, v. 782, *Equitan*, v. 69), pallor (*Guigemar*, v. 424, *Eliduc*, v. 306), fainting (*Yonec*, vv. 323, 396, 538, *Eliduc*, v. 853), crying (*Guigemar*, v. 622, *Yonec*, vv. 46, 61, *Chevrefoil*, v. 104, *Eliduc*, vv. 785, 975), and sleeplessness (*Guigemar*, vv. 411, 429, *Equitan*, vv. 63, 99, *Yonec*, v. 267, *Laüstic*, vv. 76, 108, *Eliduc*, vv. 331–32).²⁷ The number of occasions on which Marie emphasizes the suffering of her lovers, using the terms *susfrir*, *suffrance*, *anguisse/anguissus*, *destreit*, *doel/dolur/dolent*, *effrei*, *ennui*, *estrif*, *mal*, *martire*, *peine*, *travail*, *tristur*, *murnes*, *pensis*, *trespensis*, is too large to be listed here. Love makes its sufferers feel hopeless, bewildered or powerless, and they often bemoan their fate (*pleindre*, *se dementer*, *faire sa plainte*), and they address themselves, beginning with terms such as “Allas” [Alas] or “mal m'estait” [woe is me], and call themselves “cheitif” [unhappy one] or “malbailli” [mistreated one].²⁸ The use of these motifs and expressions to convey the theme of love was by no means unknown at the time (they are found, for example, in the *Roman d'Eneas* and the classical lays of *Piramus and Tisbé* and *Narcisus and Dané*), but their ultimate source lies primarily in the erotic works of Ovid.²⁹ But Ovid's precise influence on Marie remains uncertain. Robert Edwards has recently argued that Ovid provided Marie with the conceptual framework for her poetic invention and that her concept of the workings of love and desire within courtly society was influenced by his erotic project (finding, capturing, keeping, and abandoning a lover).³⁰ However, as Jacques Thomas has argued, Marie's reaction to Ovid's erotic project may have been largely negative in that, as we have seen, she shunned Ovidian-type artificiality and scheming in favor of sincerity, spontaneity, and authenticity.³¹

²⁷ Marie tells us that she herself spent sleepless nights working on her lays (General Prologue, v. 42).

²⁸ See especially *Guigemar*, vv. 399–406, *Laüstic*, vv. 126–34, and *Yonec*, vv. 67–104. See also my *Text and Context*, pp. 174–76.

²⁹ See Edmond Faral, *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1913), pp. 125–54.

³⁰ Robert R. Edwards, “Marie de France and *Le Livre Ovide*,” *Mediaevalia* 26 (2005), 57–81.

³¹ Jacques T.E. Thomas, “Vénus, Ovide, Marie de France et l'amour: autour des vers 239–41 de *Guigemar*,” in “*Contez me tout*: mélanges de langue et de littérature médiévale offerts à Herman Braet,” ed. Catherine Bel, Pascale Dumont, and Frank

For this reason it may well have been Ovid's *Ars amatoria* rather than, as often thought, his *Remedia amoris* that Venus was throwing into the flames in *Guigemar* (vv. 234–44).

Marie's ladies, some unmarried, some unhappily married, seem to be waiting for love to enter their lives, and they can be very bold in the way they make the first move (e.g. the maiden who sends a messenger to Milun, vv. 27–48, and Guilliadun, who summons Eliduc to come and take his ease with her, vv. 275–80), or in the way they respond to the knights' entreaties (e.g. *Bisclavret*, vv. 109–16, *Laüstic*, vv. 26–28). They are relatively passive creatures, but when something goes wrong they display inner resources (e.g. the maiden who suggests the potion in the *Deus Amanz*, vv. 95–108, the lady in *Laüstic* who wraps the nightingale's body in samite, vv. 133–37).³² Above all, they are seeking a long-lasting relationship.

The knights in the anonymous lays have, on the whole, a greater struggle with their ladies than those in Marie. Yolande de Pontfarcy has commented recently that the women in these lays manifest a "pouvoir inquiétant et ensorcelant."³³ Graelent and Guingamor come up against an importunate queen, whose attentions transform their lives, and like *Desiré* they become subject to the control of a supernatural mistress with the power both to bestow love and to take it away. Tyolet (v. 344ff.) and Melion (v. 146ff.) react to challenges from women that transform their lives: Tyolet marries the challenger, but Melion ends up cursing her and wishing she could be burnt or dismembered (vv. 581–86). Nabaret's "excessively proud" wife ("orgiluse ert a demesure," v. 11) angers and humiliates him, and she is seemingly beyond his control. Doon is up against another proud woman (v. 18), who fails in her attempt to kill him in his bed and then imposes a second, unexpected test on him before finally agreeing to marry him. Unusually, he manages to assert his own power and conduct the

Willaert (Louvain, 2006), pp. 329–40 (p. 339). "Pour Marie," writes Thomas, "le lien d'amour se crée dans une démarche sincère, franche et sans détour, qui exclut de part et d'autre toute manœuvre, toute stratégie" (p. 339). See also on this passage, Logan E. Whalen, *Poetics of Memory*, pp. 96–101.

³² See, for example, Roberta L. Krueger, "Transforming Maidens: Singlewomen's Stories in Marie de France's *Lais* and Later French Courtly Narratives," in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 146–91.

³³ Yolande de Pontfarcy, "La Voix des écrivains transpositeurs des *lais* anonymes," in "Contez-me tout" (see above, n. 31), pp. 159–74 (p. 172).

relationship on his terms. In spite of her commitment to her husband, the maiden in *Espine* lets inquisitiveness get the better of her; in her search for the truth she removes the bridle from the magic horse with the result that the horse is lost (vv. 500–04). In *Lecheor* the group of knights assembled for the festival find that, instead of a celebration of their chivalric deeds, their baser instinct and true erotic motivation are exposed by the perspicacity of one of the “wise,” “noble,” and “courtly” ladies present (v. 55ff). All in all, the male members of the audience must have been both impressed and disconcerted by the strong women portrayed in these lays. They offer young knights emotional fulfillment, sexual satisfaction, and a passport to the acquisition of wealth, land, and power, and they also ensure dynastic succession by providing heirs (even the *fée* in *Desiré* leaves a son and daughter behind in the real world when she departs for her own land, vv. 808–11). But few of the knights escape the controlling influence women have over their lives.

IV. *The supernatural or merveilleux element*

Although our concept of the supernatural or the *merveilleux* may not coincide precisely with that of the Middle Ages, three of Marie’s lays qualify for inclusion in the category of supernatural lays: *Guigemar*, the first lay in the Harley collection; *Lanval*, the fifth; and *Yonec*, the seventh.³⁴ It is possible that these lays were composed consecutively in the order *Lanval*, *Yonec*, *Guigemar*. In *Bisclavret* the transformation of man into wolf, and in *Eliduc* the resuscitation of Guilliadun thanks to a red flower taken from a weasel’s mouth (vv. 1032–54), are folklore rather than supernatural elements.³⁵ In *Lanval* the hero, struggling to cope with the real world of Arthur’s court, falls in love with a supernatural woman or *fée*. In *Yonec* a wife, imprisoned in a tower by her jealous husband, prays for a lover and is rewarded when a hawk flies into her room and is transformed into a courtly knight

³⁴ For a brief study of the *merveilleux*, see Daniel Poirion, *Le Merveilleux dans la littérature française du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1982); for a more substantial study, see Francis Dubost, *Aspects fantastiques de la littérature narrative médiévale (XII^{ème}–XIII^{ème} siècles)* (Paris, 1991).

³⁵ In his division of the lays into realistic lays and supernatural lays, S. Foster Damon included *Bisclavret* in the latter category: “Marie de France: Psychologist of Courtly Love,” *PMLA* 44 (1929), 968–96.

(vv. 105–15). In *Guigemar* both the hero and his beloved are presented as humans, but he meets her thanks to a talking hind and a magic boat that transports him from his own territory to her home in an “antive cité” [ancient city] (v. 207).³⁶ The entry of the *merveilleux* into the lives of Marie’s personages occurs when they are undergoing misfortune: neglected by Arthur, Lanval is in a sorry plight (“mut entrepris,” v. 33), grief-stricken (“dolent,” vv. 34, 37), “downcast” (“pensis,” v. 34), and “descunseillez” [forlorn] (v. 36). The lady in *Yonec* is “en grant tristur” and, reduced to constant sighs and tears, she hopes that death will soon take her (vv. 45–50). Severely wounded by the rebounding arrow, Guigemar laments his suffering (“Mult anguissusement se pleint,” v. 138) before climbing on board a deserted ship (vv. 165–69).

The *merveilleux* element has an even more important role to play in the anonymous lays. It occurs in its clearest form in *Desiré*, *Graelent*, *Guingamor*, and *Tydorel*, but there are also strong supernatural features in *Espine* and *Tyolet* and, to a lesser extent, in *Doon* and *Melion*. The lay of *Trot*, in which a living hero encounters processions of riders seemingly from the world of the dead, is a further, if different example. The lays of *Desiré*, *Graelent*, *Guingamor*, and *Tydorel* are similar to Marie’s supernatural lays in that human beings, three males and one woman (the queen in *Tydorel*), fall in love with a supernatural figure. Unlike Lanval, *Desiré* is in a happy frame of mind when he rides out of his hometown of Calder for his pleasure (“Por soi deduire velt monter,” v. 105) and thereby meets his beloved, and the lady in *Tydorel*, although childless, seems to be happily married when her lover comes for her in her garden in Nantes (vv. 40–68). *Graelent* and *Guingamor*, however, both leave court in an unhappy state. Like Lanval, they have both been propositioned by their queen and have rejected her advances. Also like Lanval, *Graelent* has a financial problem, because his military pay has been held back at the queen’s instigation (vv. 152–59). *Guingamor* is in great fear (“en grant peor,” v. 136) of being denounced by the queen, so when the latter proposes that a knight from her husband’s court should hunt for the white boar (vv. 153–62), he accepts the challenge, returning to his own land only three hundred years later (v. 598).

³⁶ R.N. Illingworth asserts that Marie has drawn the story of Guigemar from the tale of an all-powerful fairy who lures her chosen mortal to her fairy island: “Celtic Tradition and the *Lai* of Guigemar,” *Medium Aevum* 31 (1962), 176–87.

In spite of its chivalric and courtly elements, *Espine* is a supernatural lay; the core of the story revolves around the youth's combat at the ford against supernatural or otherworldly knights. The nearby hawthorn tree and the inclusion of motifs such as transportation in sleep from one location to another and the acquisition of a magic horse that does not need to be fed as long as its bridle is left on it (vv. 416–19) confirm the non-realistic nature of the adventure. In *Doon* there are strong realistic elements in the portrayal of the maiden from Edinburgh, Doon himself, and their son. But the maiden's ability to kill her suitors in their bed, after they have completed the journey from Southampton to Edinburgh in a day, indicates a special skill, and this vengeful killing, which makes her very happy ("durement lie," v. 63), suggests the cruelty of a non-human figure. Like the other fairy-mistress figures, she has been associated with Morgan the Fée (see Burgess and Brook, p. 17). Doon's knowledge of the way to survive the death-dealing bed, his possession of a horse with seemingly magic properties, and his decision to leave his wife after three days of marriage, with an announcement of her pregnancy before he does so, are also redolent of a non-human figure. Melion's wife comes to him in his forest, telling him, in words that echo his vow, that she has never loved, and will never love, a man other than himself (vv. 109–12), and her later statement that she will never eat again if she does not have some meat from a stag shown to her by her husband (vv. 147–48) are characteristics of a *fée*. All these various *merveilleux* elements are, of course, catalysts for plot developments, and the function of each one has to be assessed individually within its particular thematic context.

What are the indications that the supernatural is present, or that there are links to the Other World? Water is of considerable importance as a marker of the frontier between two worlds (see below). The *fée* often has handmaidens who introduce the hero to her (*Lanval*, vv. 55–56, *Desiré*, vv. 134–43) or accompany her when the hero first sets eyes on her (*Graelent*, vv. 239–40, *Guingamor*, vv. 427–28, cf. vv. 656–58). The gold basins in *Lanval* (v. 61) and *Desiré* (v. 143) are signs of the supernatural, as are the trembling of Lanval's horse (v. 46) and the curious disappearance of the lady's companions in *Tydorel* (vv. 36–39). The *fées* are fabulously beautiful (*Lanval*, vv. 93–104, 549–84, 591, 602, *Desiré*, vv. 156, 188–99, *Graelent*, vv. 229–32, 266, *Guingamor*, vv. 428–35), and they are associated with unlimited wealth (*Lanval*, vv. 138–42, *Desiré*, vv. 163–64, *Graelent*, vv. 319–20), or with objects of great value (the lady's tent in *Lanval*, vv. 80–92, the palace,

and clothing, etc., in *Guingamor*, vv. 503–32), the horse in *Graelent* (vv. 373–74). The ship, the bed, with its magic pillow, and the candelabra in *Guigemar* (vv. 153–86) are also suggestive of otherworldly riches. A noteworthy aspect of the supernatural figure is the ability to prophesy, especially the birth of a child (*Yonec*, vv. 325–32, *Doon*, vv. 177–78, *Tydorel*, vv. 111–48). In *Guigemar* the hind issues a prophecy concerning Guigemar's future (vv. 106–21), and the lady in *Melion* has foreknowledge that, although in the form of a wolf, her husband will continue to cause grief (vv. 328–29). Especially disconcerting for their lovers are the power and the cruelty of the supernatural figures. Lanval is told by the *fée* not to reveal his love, otherwise he will lose her (vv. 144, 50), Graelent receives a similar command from his beloved (vv. 316–18), and Desiré's *amie* orders him not to transgress ("meserer," v. 235), without saying specifically what would constitute a transgression. Guingamor is told not to eat or drink after he has crossed the river on his return to his own land (vv. 564–68). Naturally, for the sake of the story, all the heroes ignore their beloved's command and are only belatedly rescued from despair, punishment, or even death when the *fée* decides to, or is persuaded to, take pity on them.

If we include *Doon* and *Melion*, eight supernatural lays end with the lovers together, four in the real world (*Guigemar*, *Doon*, *Espine*, *Tyolet*) and four in the Other World (*Lanval*, *Desiré*, *Graelent*, *Guingamor*). In *Yonec* the lady's lover, Muldumarec, dies within the narrative (his death constitutes a lengthy and important episode within the lay, vv. 297–456), which concludes with the death of the lady (vv. 537–39) and the husband's beheading by her son Yonec (vv. 542–44). In *Milun* the hero and his wife are estranged at the close of the narrative, and in *Trot Lorois* returns to court having learnt a lesson, seemingly from beyond the grave, concerning the obligation to love and to serve one's lover.

V. *Objects and symbols*

No one can doubt the potency of symbols in medieval life and literature. Almost any aspect of the natural world (animals, birds, flowers, trees, etc.), or any object, color, act, or gesture can take on symbolic value. Many of these images have a long tradition in literature and folklore, but what is of importance is the way in which each element functions within a given narrative. Of the various images that merit an

extended examination, I shall largely restrict myself here to (a) water, (b) forests and trees, and (c) rings, with a few comments on other symbols.

(a) *Water*

When Guigemar (vv. 192–208) and Eliduc (vv. 87–88) sail over a substantial stretch of water, their lives are thereby transformed. After their journey, both men meet a woman they will love and with whom they will be united after a prolonged period of suffering. Milun's son (vv. 319–20), and later his father (v. 375), cross from Britain to Normandy where they too are united after a long period of separation. Doon (vv. 79–80) sails from Brittany to Southampton to attempt the test imposed on her suitors by the lady from Edinburgh. Although there is no further mention of sea-crossings, Doon (v. 186) and later his son (vv. 197–98) sail to Brittany, where they are united at the Mont-Saint-Michel tournament. They then return to Britain to be re-united as a family (v. 275). Melion's wife (vv. 193–99) travels to Ireland after his metamorphosis into a wolf, thus transforming the plot, and in due course he stows away on a boat in wolf form (vv. 220–44), only just managing to escape from the mariners. The first step towards Melion's salvation occurs when he spots King Arthur and his knights arriving by sea to bring peace to warring factions in Ireland (vv. 337–71).

There is also an element of magic associated with water in the encounter between Lanval and his future beloved; he dismounts beside a stream and his horse trembles violently (vv. 44–45), as if presaging his entry into the Other World (cf. also vv. 178–79). Lorois is riding through a meadow alongside a river when he encounters his first group of riders (*Trot*, v. 65). The ability of the Tydorel's father to plunge into the deepest part of a lake and to remain submerged for a considerable length of time is indicative of his supernatural nature (vv. 100–03; he has been called a "monstre aquatique" and an "homme-poisson"). At the close of the text his son joins him beneath the water. The author's comment that those who manage to swim across this lake will know whatever they wish to know and have all their desires fulfilled (vv. 94–98) confirms that water can be a route to perfection, to omniscience, and to man's eternal dream of happiness. Water is also important in *Guingamor* and *Graelent*, as the heroes of these tales meet their *fée* while she is bathing in a spring (Desiré also meets his beloved close to a spring, v. 141). In *Guingamor* the hero sets off

in pursuit of the white boar and comes to a perilous river ("riviere perilleuse," v. 358); he crosses it and then rides alongside it (v. 398). When he wishes to return to his own land, he is taken to the river (vv. 579–80) with instructions not to eat once he has crossed it, however hungry he may feel (vv. 567–68). Having disobeyed and thereby become disfigured and decrepit, he has to be taken back across the river by two of his beloved's handmaidens (vv. 665–66). Graelent too disobeys his beloved's command not to follow her when she crosses a river with beautiful, clear water running through the center of a forest; he is rescued only when the lady's handmaidens accuse her of behaving cruelly and committing a sin against him.

The scene of the principal adventure in *Espine* occurs at what is called both the Hawthorn Ford ("gué de l'Espine," vv. 204, 227, 266, 288) and the Adventurous Ford ("gué aventuro[u]s," v. 223). The fighting takes place on the shingle next to the ford (vv. 327, 378, 436), which is described as a place of suffering ("la poine de cest trespas," v. 403). The combat begins with the arrival of an opponent from the other side of the ford (vv. 306–07), and later two further knights cross the ford (v. 357).³⁷

Water in these lays is often linked to women. Indeed, like earth, it is a female principle. It is also associated with life and death, purification and regeneration.³⁸ Structurally, water often acts as the barrier between two worlds, the real world and the Other World.

(b) *Forests and trees*

Forests are ubiquitous in medieval romances. They provide a contrast with the activities of the court, setting the latter's sophisticated values off against the dangers, surprises, and unpredictability of the forest (another female symbol). As Corinne Saunders puts it, forests are "specialized worlds of marvel, peril and delight."³⁹ Entering a forest,

³⁷ In *Equitan* Marie uses bathing and water as a means of bringing her story to a conclusion (vv. 269–306). Like the death-dealing bed in *Doon*, the *cuve* [tub] adds an element of surprise to the *dénouement*.

³⁸ See J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1971), pp. 364–67, and Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles: mythes, rêves, coutumes, gestes, formes, figures, couleurs, nombres* (Paris, 1969; rev. ed. 1982), pp. 374–82.

³⁹ Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 205. Forests, Saunders adds, are "just on the margins of human credibility, lingering somewhere between nightmare and wish-fulfilment" (*ibid.*).

like reaching water, signifies a movement forward, a new beginning, liberation from courtly values. Guigemar's adventure begins when he enters the forest ("Al matin vait en la forest," v. 79). After his encounter with the hind, he walks through the forest (v. 145), along a green path that takes him out on to a plain. In *Le Fresne* the serving-maiden entrusted to dispose of the baby girl travels along a "grant chemin" leading to a forest ("Ki en la forest l'ad mené," v. 140). Bisclavret's transformation into a wolf occurs when he enters a large forest ("En cele grant forest me met," v. 64); we had already been told that werewolves inhabit great forests ("Es granz forez converse e vait," v. 12). Later, the first stage of Bisclavret's salvation begins when the king enters the forest ("A la forest ala tut dreit," v. 137), and the return of his clothing is only made possible when the king makes his way there once more ("Que a la forest ala li reis," v. 221). When Tristram makes up his mind to see Yseut, he heads straight for the forest ("En la forest tut sul se mist," v. 29), and later, "in the wood," she finds the man who loves her more than any living thing ("Dedenz le bois celui trova / Que plus l'amot que rien vivant," vv. 92–93). The lay of *Eliduc* shows how woods can be used in warfare for purposes of ambush ("Si l'unt de si que al bois mené; / Pres del chemin sunt enbuschié," vv. 202–03).

Desiré's adventure begins when he rides away from his hometown of Calder and enters a forest ("En la forest se met avant," v. 124). When we first meet Tyolet, he lives in a wood with his mother (v. 49), as his father had done before his death ("Tot seul en la forest manoit," v. 53). Tyolet's adventure begins when he leaves home and goes into the surrounding wood (v. 79). Guingamor's encounter with his beloved is linked to the "aventure de la forest" (v. 171). The queen challenges one of her husband's knights to hunt the white boar that lives in the forest surrounding the court ("en la forest ci defors," v. 157, cf. v. 203). The young man in *Espine* confirms his right to marry his beloved by chivalric activities that unite water (the ford) and trees (the hawthorn bush). It is when the youth is sitting beneath this bush that he spots the arrival of his first opponent (v. 300). Water and trees are again united in Tydorel, where the queen's lover takes her along the edge of the forest ("lez la forest," v. 91), and after he has emerged from the lake he tells her that he comes and goes along a specific route through the forest ("Desoz cest bois / Par ceste voie vien et vois," vv. 107–08, cf. 415). When Graellent leaves the town, having been mocked by the inhabitants because of his poor apparel, his adventure begins when he reaches a clearing in a "forest grant et pleniére" (v. 205).

The river to which Graellent follows his beloved runs through the center of the forest ("parmi la forest," v. 682). Melion is given a castle by Arthur near a forest that affords him satisfaction of his every whim ("Ja deduit ne demandast / Que en la forest ne trovast," vv. 69–70), and it is in this forest that he meets his future wife. One day, when he goes into the forest ("Un jor en la forest ala," v. 133), his life changes radically, as it is here that he is transformed into a wolf. Later, when he has sailed to Ireland in wolf form, he again enters a forest that becomes his home until the arrival of King Arthur (v. 253, cf. vv. 259, 263, 267, 298, 321). In *Trot* Lorois's adventure begins when he decides to enter the forest ("En la forest s'en veut aler," v. 45, cf. v. 64). It is as he draws near the forest that he catches sight of the first of the various groups of riders ("Et quant la forest aprocha," v. 75), whose appearance and methods of riding (trotting or ambling) are described at some length.

(c) *Rings*

As symbols of identification, harmony, perfection, continuity, wholeness, the infinite, the life cycle, eternity, etc., rings are extremely useful to authors. As Logan Whalen points out, they can unveil hidden meaning and spark off a memory of past events (*Poetics of Memory*, p. 84). They create a bond, whether between blood relations and or between lovers. If they are also of gold, especially pure gold (*fin or*), this adds to their status as precious objects and endows them with an element of spirituality. Marie has Le Fresne's mother give her a "gros anel" with an ounce of "fin or" when the baby is being taken away by the serving-maiden (vv. 128–29); the ring later confirms Le Fresne's identification, thus permitting her to marry Gurun and achieve harmony in her life (vv. 439–44, 475–78). The ring had originally been given to the mother by Le Fresne's father, when they had first met, so at that stage it had served a different purpose, being a sign of commitment and love. Another ring appears in *Milun*. Again it is given to a baby about to be taken away from its mother (v. 95). More than 20 years later the ring is recognized by his father Milun, who spots it on his son's finger after the latter has defeated him in a tournament (v. 432). Once more, this recognition is a prelude to marriage and wholeness.

When Muldumarec's beloved visits him on his deathbed, he gives her a ring that will make her husband forget what has happened

(vv. 415–20); here the ring maintains harmony by preventing the consequences of the husband's wrath. Rings also make excellent love-tokens: Guilliadun sends Eliduc a gold ring as a *druerie* (v. 431) in order to discover whether he had any desire to love her (vv. 379–400). In *Desiré* the hero's beloved gives him a gold ring, which he will lose, along with the lady's love, if in any way he transgresses (vv. 233–42, cf. vv. 332–33). The ring here is both a love-token and a challenge to his ability to conduct himself in a way that is to the *fée*'s liking. It is also a sign of her power.⁴⁰

Doon gives his wife a gold ring, to be passed on to his son when he is grown up (vv. 179–80). As in *Milun*, the ring is recognized when the boy later defeats his father in a joust (vv. 248, 268).⁴¹ In *Melion* a ring serves a different function. When Melion's wife states that she will never eat again if she does not have some of the meat from a certain stag, he tells her that he has a ring with a white and a crimson stone and that he will become a wolf if she touches him on the head with the white stone; to return to human form he has to be touched with the crimson stone (vv. 156–72). Only when the wife's father persuades her to hand over the ring does Melion's lengthy period as a wolf come to an end (vv. 530–49).

(d) *Other symbols*

Among other recurring objects or images in the lays are beds and bedding, evident symbols of desire, sexuality, and repose, but also places of privacy (especially for the man-wolf who wishes to return to human form) and even of death.⁴² The pillow on the bed in Guigemar's ship is such that no one who has laid his head on it ever had white hair

⁴⁰ See Alain Corbellari, "Les Jeux de l'anneau: fonctions et trajets d'un objet emblématique de la littérature narrative médiévale," in *De sens rassis: Essays in Honor of Rupert T. Pickens*, ed. Keith Busby, Bernard Guidot, and Logan E. Whalen (Amsterdam, 2005), pp. 157–67: "L'anneau est l'emblème par excellence du pouvoir et de la puissance temporelle" (p. 161).

⁴¹ Verse 248 of *Doon* ("En son doit reconnut l'anel") recalls v. 432 of *Milun* ("Al deit celui conut l'anel").

⁴² "Symbole de la régénérescence dans le sommeil, et dans l'amour; il est aussi symbole de la mort" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, p. 578). See *Guigemar*, vv. 170–89, 203, 294, 362–65, 439, *Equitan*, vv. 273–83, *Le Fresne*, vv. 389–416, *Bisclavret*, vv. 298–99, *Lanval*, vv. 97–98, 109, 153, 307, *Yonec*, vv. 166, 315, 380–90, *Eliduc*, vv. 1010–11, 1031, *Desiré*, vv. 25, 178–80, 395, 409, 667–68, 684, *Doon*, vv. 55–60, 114–24, *Graelent*, v. 70, *Melion*, v. 446, and *Tydorel*, vv. 302–03, 342.

(vv. 151–86). Several lays contain memorable images that are of particular importance to the story concerned: e.g. the *chemise* (vv. 558, 650, 730, 810, cf. *Graelent*, v. 248) and the *ceinture* (vv. 570, 722, 739, 819) in *Guigemar*, the cloak in *Lanval* (v. 571) and *Guingamor* (vv. 113–19, 129–30), clothing in *Bisclavret* (vv. 71–77, 95–96, 124, 268–92), *Lanval* (vv. 57–59, 101–02, 559–60), *Melion* (vv. 87–90), *Nabaret* (vv. 8–10, 24, 34–35), *Trot* (vv. 34–40, 81–87, 118–22), etc., the *paille roé* [silk brocade with wheel or ring patterns] in *Le Fresne* (vv. 123, 403–46, 474, cf. also *Desiré*, v. 180, *Graelent*, v. 379), the chapel in *Bisclavret* (v. 91), *Eliduc* (vv. 989, 1010, 1045), and *Desiré* (vv. 133, 318), the *chasse* [casket] in *Laüstic* (v. 155), and the mountain in the *Deus Amanz* (vv. 9, 44, 83, 148, 161, 181, 203, 239, 242).

Of special importance are animals and birds: stags or hinds in *Guigemar* (vv. 90–122), *Desiré* (v. 471), *Graelent* (vv. 211–17), and *Melion* (vv. 77–80, 147–48, 165–66, 184–88, 205–10); the boar in *Guingamor* (v. 155ff.); wolves in *Bisclavret* and *Melion*; the hawk in *Yonec* (vv. 106, 110–11, etc.), the nightingale in *Laüstic*, the swan in *Milun* (v. 164, etc.) and *Doon* (vv. 137–48); the weasel in *Eliduc* (v. 1032ff.); and horses in *Doon* (vv. 72–78, 140–52), *Espine* (vv. 348–52, 414, 473, 493–504), *Graelent* (vv. 735–51), and *Trot* (v. 99ff.). *Tyolet* contains references to the “bestes” that the hero captures thanks to his whistling skills (vv. 44, 67), and to various stags (vv. 77, 86ff., 347–60, etc.), a hunting dog (*brachet*, vv. 329, 369, etc.), and seven lions (vv. 356, 445, 462–87, 655).⁴³ The white animals in *Guigemar*, *Graelent*, and *Guingamor* can be associated with the Celtic motif of an animal that leads the hero to an encounter with a *fée* (in *Desiré* the stag episode occurs after the hero has met his beloved, and here it serves to introduce him to his son, v. 471ff.). Other white animals in the lays are the white palfreys in *Lanval* (v. 551) and *Tyolet* (v. 328), the white horses in *Espine* (v. 311) and in *Tydorel* (“Li destriers fu blans comme flor,” v. 83), and the white hunting dog in *Tyolet* (v. 329).⁴⁴ In *Tyolet* it is repeatedly emphasized that the color of the desired foot of the stag is white (vv. 347, 352, 458, 578, 585), a color linked to purity and to the supernatural.

⁴³ For a discussion of the concept of the “chevalier-beste” in this lay, see Burgess and Brook, pp. 96–100.

⁴⁴ The horse in *Espine* has red ears, which correspond to the color of the armor worn by its rider (vv. 307–10).

Symbols draw diverse elements together and act as a visible sign of the invisible. Of all the symbols under consideration, it is perhaps the nightingale in *Laüstic* that dominates and demonstrates the meaning of its lay most effectively. Referred to in three languages, as a “rus-sinol,” a “nihtegale,” and a “laüstic,” it is listened to as a source of joy (vv. 84–90), hunted (vv. 94–103), strangled (v. 115), thrown at the wife by the husband (v. 117), wrapped in samite (vv. 135–37), and placed in a precious casket (v. 154). The lady sees it as being betrayed (“Ceus ki le laüstic traïrent,” v. 123). The bird has been seen as a symbol of love, of physical love when alive and spiritual love when dead, of the lady’s emotional life, of the ecstasy of love, of the ephemeral nature of happiness, of an ideal that can never be fulfilled, of an alliance between the natural world and the lovers against the evils of a cruel and hostile world, etc. The swan in *Milun* is a messenger, but also a powerful symbol of the loyalty maintained by the lovers over a lengthy period; its whiteness, its beautiful body, and phallic neck make it an excellent image of both purity and sexual union.⁴⁵ The only symbols for which Marie provides a gloss are the hazel (*codre*) and the honeysuckle (*chevrefoil*) in *Chevrefoil*. The honeysuckle clings to the hazel and together they survive; when separated, they both soon die (vv. 68–76).⁴⁶

Conclusions

When the compiler of MS S intermingled nine of Marie’s lays with eight of the anonymous lays, without mentioning her name, his action was justifiable in that there are few clear-cut distinctions between our

⁴⁵ See my “Symbolism in Marie de France’s *Laüstic* and *Le Fresne*,” *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society* 33 (1981), 258–68; and June Hall McCash, “The Swan and the Nightingale: Natural Unity in a Hostile World in the *Lais* of Marie de France,” *French Studies* 49 (1995), 385–96. For comments on the swan in *Doon*, which is at first an adversary for Doon and his horse and a guardian of the lady’s independence, then a symbol of union and loyalty, see Burgess and Brook, pp. 256–57. For further comments on objects in Marie’s lays, see Micheline de Combarieu, “Les Objets chez Marie de France,” in *Mélanges de langue et littérature françaises du Moyen Age offerts à Charles Foulon*, II, *Marche Romane* 30 (1980), pp. 37–48. Combarieu points out that Marie devotes more space to describing some objects than to her principal characters. In her view Marie’s objects are (1) related to the *merveilleux* elements in the story, (2) designed to help the development of the narrative, or (3) used as poetic elements.

⁴⁶ On the hazel and its relationship to the ash, see my article cited in n. 45.

two groups of tales.⁴⁷ If Marie's lays can be defined structurally as an account of love relationships and their outcomes within the feudal and courtly world, this is equally true of eight of the anonymous lays. The exceptions are *Lecheor*, *Nabaret*, and *Trot*, which in some ways form a separate group, albeit one that still concerns relationships between knights and ladies.⁴⁸

In 1905 Lucien Foulet compared Marie's lays with the anonymous lays and concluded that "l'histoire des lais français commence et s'arrête à Marie" (p. 319). For him the anonymous lays were chronologically later than Marie, and their authors, far less talented than Marie, borrowed from her extensively. It remains true that there is no evidence that the anonymous lays, as we have them, predate those by Marie, but the dating of all the lays remains uncertain. Marie's lays are dated from the 1160s (e.g. Rychner, p. xii) to 1189 (Ewert, p. x), the anonymous lays to the later years of the 12th century or the beginning of the 13th.

It is not my purpose here to pronounce on the literary qualities of the lays under discussion. Most readers would accept that Marie's *Laiistic* and *Yonec* have a greater poetic density than, for example, *Espine* or *Nabaret*, but such views as that of Foulet, that the author of *Espine* was a "plagiaire médiocre et inintelligent" (p. 36), or of Tobin, for whom *Desiré* is completely lacking in originality and depth (p. 168), seem excessively harsh.

The question of whether Marie's themes and story patterns, or even her actual wording, influenced the anonymous authors needs to be examined lay by lay. An initial assessment reveals several clear thematic links: *Bisclavret* can be compared with *Melion* (the werewolf), *Lanval* with *Graelent* and *Guingamor* (the Potiphar's Wife theme and the love of a mortal for a *fée*), *Milun* with *Doon* (the father-son combat), and *Yonec* with *Tydorel* (a supernatural knight fathers a child on a mortal woman). Some lays, such as *Tyolet*, have no specific thematic links with Marie's lays, but they do contain a number of verbal reminiscences: *Tyolet* v. 38 ("Selonc le conte que je sai") is identical

⁴⁷ MS S (see above, n. 4) also contains *Amours*, *Aristote*, *Conseil*, *Cor*, *Mantel*, *Oiselet*, and *Ombre*.

⁴⁸ For other possible groupings, see G.V. Smithers, "Story-Patterns in some Breton Lays," *Medium Aevum* 22 (1953), 61-92. For a broader structural study, see Renate Kroll, *Der narrative Lai als eigenständige Gattung in der Literatur des Mittelalters: zum Strukturprinzip der Aventure in den Lais*, (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie) 201 (Tübingen, 1984).

to *Le Fresne* v. 2 ("Sulunc le cunte que jeo sai"); and Tyolet's lady (vv. 696–98) is described in identical terms to those used to describe the *fée* in *Lanval* (vv. 94–96).⁴⁹ But did one author borrow from another, or did they both borrow from a common source?

On the surface it appears evident that the author of *Melion* imitated *Bisclavret*. The central figure in both narratives is the werewolf, and clothing, although it is less important in *Melion*, is involved in the transformation of each man into a wolf (*Bisclavret*, vv. 68–96, 268–99, *Melion*, vv. 173–78). Both *Bisclavret* and *Melion*, as wolves, seek revenge at a king's court and are threatened by the king's men (*Bisclavret* attacks his wife and her new husband, vv. 196–203, 231–37, and *Melion* attacks his squire, vv. 491–93). The wolf is returned to human form in the king's chamber (*Bisclavret*, vv. 293–99, *Melion*, vv. 540–50). But Philippe Ménard has rightly pointed out that to see in *Melion* a "simple imitation" of Marie's lay would be a "vision simpliste"; there are so many differences between the two narratives that the author of *Melion* must also have borrowed from other texts.⁵⁰ Amanda Hopkins goes as far as to assert that "*Melion* displays no definitive evidence of any reliance on, or acquaintance with, Marie's text" (in Burgess and Brook, p. 420). Hopkins sees *Bisclavret* and *Melion* as deriving from separate sources (p. 421), probably with a single ultimate source for all the medieval werewolf texts (p. 418).

The relationship between *Lanval*, *Graelent*, and *Guingamor* is complex. The attribution of *Graelent* to Marie de France and the view that *Graelent* was older than *Lanval* were dealt with by W.H. Schofield in a lengthy article published in 1900.⁵¹ Foulet concluded that there was a "ressemblance frappante" between *Graelent* and *Lanval*, both in subject-matter and expression (p. 20), adding that the author of *Graelent* had cleverly hidden his borrowings from *Lanval* by borrowing also from other lays by Marie, especially *Eliduc* (for details, see Foulet, pp. 21–25). Foulet also found passages in *Guingamor* that he considered to be the counterpart of passages in *Graelent* (pp. 25–28), but his find-

⁴⁹ There is little sign of any textual borrowing from Marie in *Lecheor*, *Nabaret*, and *Trot*, unless with Foulet (pp. 53–54) and other scholars we take the view that *Lecheor* is a parody of the genre of the lay, as represented and defined by Marie.

⁵⁰ Philippe Ménard, "Les Histoires de loup-garou au Moyen Age," in *Symposium in honorem Prof. M. de Riquer* (Barcelona, 1984), pp. 209–38 (p. 22). See also Tobin, ed., pp. 294–96.

⁵¹ William Henry Schofield, "The Lays of *Graelent* and *Lanval*, and the Story of Wayland," *PMLA* 15 (1900), 121–80.

ings are complicated by that fact that, even if somewhat tentatively, he attributed *Guingamor* to Marie. The definitive view of these three lays, chronologically and thematically, is that of R.N. Illingworth, who concluded that they were composed in the order *Lanval*, *Graelent*, and *Guingamor*, with *Graelent* and *Guingamor* (both anonymous) drawing on *Lanval*, but *Guingamor* also drawing on *Graelent*.⁵² Moreover, although the narratives were taken largely from Marie, the two anonymous lays integrated into their stories, independently of Marie, material stemming from "a nucleus of genuine Celtic tradition."⁵³

The father-son combat episodes in *Milun* and *Doon* contain the clearest case of the borrowing of a single episode. It seems most likely that the author of *Doon* borrowed textually from *Milun*, e.g. "En son doit reconnut l'anel" (*Doon*, v. 248); "Al dei celui cunuit l'anel" (*Milun*, v. 432); "Onques por coup a chevalier / Ne chaï mes de mon destrier" (*Doon*, vv. 259–60); "Unques pur coup de chevalier / Ne chaï mes de mun destrier" (*Milun*, vv. 443–44). There are also thematic and textual links between *Doon* (vv. 27–30, 40, 65–68) and *Guigemar* (vv. 654, 53), and between *Doon* and both the *Deus Amanz* (the test aimed at the avoidance of marriage) and *Yonec* (the prophecy of the birth of a child).

In *Tydorel* the supernatural knight says to the queen: "De moi avrez .I. fiz molt bel, / Sel ferez nomer Tydorel; / Molt ert vaillanz et molt ert prouz" (vv. 113–15, cf. vv. 451–55). This statement was seemingly influenced by Muldumarec's observation to the lady in *Yonec* that "de lui est enceinte d'enfant, / Un fiz avra pruz e vaillant" (vv. 327–28). Later we are informed that compared to Tydorel no Breton ruler had ever been "tant preu, tant cortois, tant vaillant, / Tant large, ne tant despendant" (vv. 223–24). In *Yonec* Marie similarly tells us that compared to Yonec no one in the kingdom was "si bel, si pruz e si vaillant / E larges e bien despendant" (vv. 461–62). The 20-year love affair in *Tydorel* also has its parallel in *Milun*, and the motif of falling asleep before meeting the person one will love (*Tydorel*, vv. 29–36) is found in *Guigemar* (v. 203).⁵⁴

⁵² R.N. Illingworth, "The Composition of *Graelent* and *Guingamor*," *Medium Aevum* 44 (1975), 31–50. See also the introduction to Russell Weingartner, *Graelent and Guingamor: Two Breton Lays*, (Garland Library of Medieval Literature) series A, 37 (New York, 1985).

⁵³ Illingworth, "The Composition of *Graelent* and *Guingamor*," pp. 31, 48.

⁵⁴ Foulet (p. 38) saw *Lanval* as the "modèle manifeste" for *Desiré*, but evidence for this is very thin. See E. Margaret Grimes, *The Lays of Desiré, Graelent and Melion: Edition of the Texts with an Introduction* (New York, 1928), p. 18.

Three of Marie's lays, but up to nine of the anonymous lays, contain clear supernatural elements (only *Lecheor* and *Nabaret* have no discernible *merveilleux* element), so this can be regarded as a distinctive feature of the anonymous lays. In some cases Marie, or her sources, may have rationalized supernatural elements.⁵⁵ Another difference between the two groups is that Marie on the whole is more interested than the anonymous authors in the processes of love and what goes on in the lovers' minds, even in what we might call the psychology of love. All of the lays make use of objects and symbols, but Marie has a special talent for creating stories that revolve around a memorable image. But if we ignore Marie's authorship and regard all 23 lays as a single set of poems exploring how love and sexuality interact with and within the chivalric, courtly, and feudal worlds, we are in possession of a remarkably wide-ranging group of similar stories, all making their own contribution to the entertainment and instruction of a courtly audience. The act of "gloser la lettre" should certainly not be confined to Marie's lays.

⁵⁵ On *Guigemar*, see, for example, Carlo Donà, "La cerva divina: Guigemar e il viaggio iniziatico," *Medioevo Romanzo*, 3rd series, 20 (1996), 321–77; 21 (1997), 3–68. Donà reconstructs the mythical story of Guigemar, which includes a fairy-abduction tale. The hero travels to the land of death and his love affair is with the terrible queen of the Other World.

CHAPTER SIX

SPEAKING THROUGH ANIMALS IN MARIE DE FRANCE'S *LAIS* AND *FABLES*

Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner

The animals that perform with such captivating charm in the *Fables* and *Lais* of Marie de France come together onstage in a single manuscript: London, British Library, Harley 978. They speak to each other indirectly across the interval of some 50 folios, the fables preceding the *lais* and thus reversing the order of composition hypothesized by modern editors who place Marie's 12 short tales centered on love before her fable translations.¹ The thread of association offered by her signature and many shared features of her art invite us to follow the medieval scribe's example by looking at animals in both works, together as well as separately, in order to bring into sharper focus what links and what more properly differentiates *lais* and fables. Both illustrate Marie's gift for working in the briefest forms of narrative, packing into their elliptical shapes a many-layered complexity that increases geometrically through the combinations that emerge within each collection, as in their dialogue with a variety of traditions that surround and situate them within the larger literary system of the 12th century. But while *lais* and fables share the interplay between individual pieces and overall coherence, the difference in their truth claims and shifting modes of fictionality, intimately tied to the character of their animal representations, helps establish the specificity of each.

In her different "translations" from one world to another, Marie de France uses animals in a variety of ways to amuse and engage us but also to make us ask questions. When are these animals only, or not

¹ In *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1969), pp. xii, xix, Jean Rychner locates the collection of *Lais*, unique to Harley 978, on fols 118–60 and dates them c.1160–70; others suggest c.1170–80. Harley 978 is among 25 manuscripts that include the *Fables*. Charles Brucker locates them on fols 40a–67b and offers a date c.1189–1208, in *Les Fables, édition critique*, 2nd ed. (Louvain, 1998; 1991), pp. 3, 18–20; other scholars date them c.1167–89. All quotations will be taken from these editions; translations are my own.

really, themselves? How do they figure the multiple relations between nature and human nature, as humans and animals move along the scale from sub-human to supernatural? How do beasts (the term more common to medieval texts) move from the natural to the social world, as their traits and actions encode and comment on our own? Situated at the intersection of so many linguistic, literary, and cultural traditions, from the classical Aesop and the biblical order of creation to the medieval bestiary, from Celtic tales and myths to animal epics in Latin and the vernacular, these animals must find their particular voices, whether literally or figuratively, in the context of fable and *lai*. Readers medieval or modern must likewise engage in the art of interpretation to understand how and why they do so.²

If animals are the *sine qua non* of most fables, their appearance in the *Lais* is more circumscribed. Assorted horses, hunting dogs, singing birds, and crowing roosters are mentioned in the collection to situate action in a setting familiar to a courtly public, but Marie gives animals a special role in six of them: *Guigemar's* prophetic white hind, the werewolf of *Bisclavret*, *Yonec's* shape-shifting hawk-knight, the eponymous nightingale of *Laüstic*, the swan messenger in *Milun*, and the miracle-making weasel of *Eliduc*. Their roles may be primary or secondary, as we shall see, but the concentration on variations entailing birds in three successive *lais*, starting at the midpoint of 12 tales (*Yonec* the 7th, *Laüstic* the 8th, and *Milun* the 9th), offers a guiding thread to follow through the *Fables* as well.

Birds appear in 27 of the 102 fables gathered together in Marie's collection.³ They offer a representative cross-section of character types and themes, from predator to victim, from kingship and justice to honor, treason, and deception, as the strong and the weak struggle over food, power, and place. An inventory of birds in the *Fables* includes 19 species, in addition to the general category "oiseus" (nos 23, 46, 80) and the bat, who cannot decide if it wants to be counted with the birds or the beasts (no. 23): cock (nos 1, 60), kite (nos 4, 86), crane (nos 7, 80), eagle (nos 10, 12, 23, 46, 62, 74, 80), crow (or rook) (nos 12, 40), raven

² Cf. Arnold Clayton Henderson, "Medieval Beasts and Modern Cages: The Making of Meanings in Fables and Bestiaries," *PMLA* 97 (1982), 40–49.

³ See Harriet Spiegel, ed. and trans., *Marie de France: Fables* (Toronto, 1987). She counts 103 fables since she considers no. 65, *The Wolf and the Beetle*, and no. 66, *The Grey Wolf*, to be two different texts, whereas other editors count them as the same fable.

(or crow)⁴ (nos 13, 59, 67, 92), swallow (nos 17, 83), dove (nos 19, 61, 62, 97), hawk (nos 19, 62, 66, 79, 80), peacock (nos 31, 67), nightingale (nos 31, 66), cuckoo (no. 46), titmouse (no. 46), jackdaw (no. 56), owl (no. 79), seagull (no. 80), sparrows (no. 83), jay (no. 86), and hen (no. 102). While the aviary⁵ thus constituted does not include exotic beasts like the lions and dragons found in some fables, it does give a sense of the familiar nature of most animals found in fable's barnyards, ponds, clearings, and forests. Indeed, the rural setting of the fables (whose occasional human characters are *vilains*, rustics, peasants, farmers) accords with the generally low and sometimes comic style of the narratives, where dung heaps (no. 1 "The Cock and the Gem"), horse manure (no. 74 "The Beetle," an eagle wannabe), and bird excrement (no. 46 "The Birds and their King") find unblushing expression in the processing of food in and out (no. 79 "The Hawk and the Owl"), the effects of fear (no. 80 "The Eagle, the Hawk, and the Crane"), and the vicissitudes of power (no. 86 "The Kite").

The high style and courtly diction of the *Lais* provide a strong contrast to the *Fables* that is equally reflected in their choice of animals, not only in their connections with the pastimes of aristocratic knights and ladies but most especially in their frequent links with the marvelous, miraculous, magical, and monstrous, the outer (and inner) limits of human experience as it intersects with other worlds. Unlike the horizontality of fables where humans, animals, and even inanimate objects receive the same treatment and interact interchangeably,⁶ difference in the *lais* is maximized: humans dominate, and beasts are not expected to speak. Where difference seems to collapse, particularly in the metamorphoses of werewolf and bird-man, confusion threatens. Differentiation between the animal and human realms thus furnishes a point of departure most propitious for the *lais*' metaphorical links, symbolic associations, and figurative meanings.

⁴ In Spiegel, *Marie de France*, p. 268, she explains that "Marie uses *corf* and *corbel* for the Latin *corvus* (raven) of the Phaedrus tradition; and *corneille* for the Latin *cornix* (crow)." She translates both as "crow."

⁵ Cf. Hugh of Fouilloy's selection of birds for his popular *Aviarium*, written between c.1132 and 1152 and extant in at least 96 (often illustrated) manuscripts. See Willene B. Clark, *The Medieval Book of Birds: Hugh of Fouilloy's Aviarium, Edition, Translation and Commentary* (New York, 1992).

⁶ Norris J. Lacy's foreword to *The Fables of Marie de France*, trans. Mary Lou Martin (Birmingham, AL, 1984), p. i.

If fables seem to offer nothing of the individual, only types and general dispositions within the collectivity mapped out in the plot and reflected in the lessons of the epimythium (the morality which caps the action), the heroes and heroines of the *lais* use their narrative momentum as a means to distinguish themselves from the sameness of their human starting points, all indistinguishably handsome, beautiful, noble, and courteous, until they establish their difference in action. In the six *lais* considered here, their encounters with animals help make such a project of individuation possible.

The pedagogical imperative of fables, with their neatly distinguished narratives followed by the narrator's articulation of the lessons to be derived, favors the representation of human vices and failings, decked out in animal dress with the kind of selectivity—one trait or typical action per animal—that simplifies and amuses in order to drive the example home, which in Marie's case generally points to the realm of the social, its hierarchical order and interactions.⁷ Of course, her dramatic art and clever reinventions of the genre create plenty of wiggle room for interpretation and nuance, but on the whole the picture of animal humanity that emerges tends toward the negative, filled with abuses of power, travesties of justice, failure to keep one's place, and so on. The morals correspondingly tend toward the pragmatic. In no. 46, Marie's epimythium focuses on avoiding lords whose false words may sound menacing but whose actions inspire little fear. The narrative is richer in action and detail, but no less realistic, guided by the titmouse's advice and the narrator's commentary (vv. 45–69). The best king the birds can choose is not the cuckoo, despite his impressive song, but the noble eagle who will not fail to avenge an infamous action, as the cuckoo did when the titmouse's droppings landed on its back. The eagle will continue to devour its prey, to be sure, but only in moderation (v. 64: “il n'est de preie trop engrés”), as it rules with the prowess, wisdom, and vigor kingship requires.

In the world of the *lais*, the lessons are more indirect, subject to writing's obscurities, as Marie explains in the General Prologue, requiring from her readers analysis, reflection, and interpretation. By contrast with the fables' characterizations, humanity appears more varied in its capacity for good and evil and much in between, from Guigemar's

⁷ Despite the popularity of bestiaries in the 12th century, especially in Anglo-Norman England where Marie was probably located, she does not use her epimythia as a forum for Christian allegorizing and rarely refers to Christian themes.

reluctance to follow Nature's program until desire for love ignites (thanks to his encounter with a gender-bending doe-stag), to Guilelûec's spontaneous gesture to revive her husband's new love with a weasel's magic flower. The wide variety of animal roles represented within the human world of the *lais* reflects a different set of issues to explore beyond the gap separating vice and virtue, questions that cut deeper into the mysterious duality of human nature, even as they continue Marie's focus on the social embedding of her characters' lives.

Marie designed her two collections so that readers may play a game of combinatorics, that is, identifying sets of like objects and following their interplay: how many fables involve this or that animal, which ones share the same theme or moral, or how many *lais* introduce a *mal mariée*, which ones end happily, which stories favor the lovers and which the husbands or wives? Repetitions once recognized reveal the play of variation that may simply entertain, or uncover significant differences that require interpretation. The game also extends beyond the frame of Marie's collections: which beasts carry associations from bestiaries, lyric poetry, or Celtic myth, which tales or fables echo the Bible, Tristan, or Renart the fox? The remainder of this essay will play just such a game by following the animals' lead (especially the flying ones), picking and choosing as combinations strike this particular reader's ears and eyes.

Taking my cue from the Harley manuscript, I begin with Marie's *Fables*, where animals take center stage.⁸ Does it matter what place a particular fable occupies? The play of combinatorics will inevitably reshuffle the order according to a given reader's attention or fancy, and in any case different manuscripts of the fables do not include all 102.⁹ Nevertheless, there is an argument to be made for Marie's careful placement of the first and last fables, doubling the outside frame of prologue and epilogue with a narrative pairing that suitably frames the whole by fabling on the nature of fables.¹⁰ A rooster on his dung heap searching for food and finding a gem instead plays off nicely against a

⁸ Cf. Rupert T. Pickens, "Marie de France et la culture de la cour anglo-normande: corrélations entre les *Lais* et les *Fables*," in "*Plaist vos oïr bone cançon vaillant?*" *Mélanges offerts à François Suard* (Lille, 1999), where he concludes that the *Fables* function in relation to the *Lais* as an "originary text" (p. 722).

⁹ See the Table of Manuscript Concordances in Spiegel, *Marie de France*, pp. 279–82.

¹⁰ See Jan M. Ziolkowski on the many different meanings associated with *fable* in "The Form and Spirit of the Beast Fable," *Bestia: Yearbook of the Beast Fable Society* 2 (1990), 4–18.

hen who will continue to scratch for food, even if her mistress provides a full daily ration.¹¹ This set of fables naturally attract each other, as do the male and female of the same species. Together, they crystallize two major issues that characterize Marie's use of animals throughout the collection. One concerns the constant slippage between the animal and the human, both in the fabric of the narrative and in the move from narrative to epimythium, the moral lesson drawn. The other results from the coupling of narrative and epimythium: possible tensions or dissonance between them frequently appear when the "natural" world of performing animals serves as example for the social world and human hierarchies represented in the lessons. The liveliness that Marie's art lends to her beasts, even within the fable's small dimensions, brings these problems into the foreground, as the first and last fables demonstrate.

In the opening lines of "The Cock and the Gem," the fowl climbs on a dung heap to search for food "*sulum nature*" (v. 3), according to his nature as a particular kind of domesticated poultry. But when he finds a gem instead of something to eat, the cock begins to speak, refusing to honor the precious stone:

"ja n'i ert pur mei *honuree*!
 Si un riche hume vus trovast,
 bien sai ke de or vus aürnast,
 si acreüst vostre beauté
 par l'or, que mut ad grant clarté.
 Quant ma volenté n'ai de tei,
 ja nul *honur* n'averas de mei." (vv. 10–16, emphasis added)

[“Never will it [the gem] be honored by me! If a rich man found you, I know well that he would adorn you with gold, so your beauty would increase through the brilliance of the gold. But when I cannot have what I desire from you, you will never have any honor from me!”]

This barnyard bird knows a surprising amount about gems, precious metals, and what people do with them. His insistence on not honoring what a rich man would certainly adorn provides Marie the link to exploit in her moral, which typically builds on analogy:

¹¹ On the first and last fables, see Spiegel, "The Male Animal in the Fables of Marie de France," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees et al. (Minneapolis, 1994), pp. 111–26, here 122–23; and Howard Needler, "The Animal Fable Among Other Medieval Literary Genres," *New Literary History* 22 (1991), pp. 423–39, here 432–34.

Autresi est de meinte gent,
 [.....]
 bien et honor nient ne prisent,
 le pis pernent, le meuz despisent." (vv. 17, 21–22)

[So it is with many people...they don't esteem good and honor, they take the worst and despise the best.]

At the risk of playing the straight man, I would observe that, according to its nature, the hungry cock's disdain for the inedible gem is perfectly reasonable and fails to ground the human lesson Marie draws from it. Her analogy is founded not on a bird's understandable neglect of something he cannot eat but on the cock's elaborate speech about what has value and deserves honor. Of course, as soon as the bird begins speaking we know that we are not in the natural world but the world of fiction, where animals speak like and for the men and women whose foibles they represent. Truth in this context is to be located not in the representation of the animal "sulum nature" but in the verisimilitude of typically human behavior. We are in the space between a cock and the very human quality of being cocksure.

If speech is precisely what differentiates man and beast, according to biblical and classical traditions, then Marie has clearly not "taken the side of animals," as Francis Ponge claims to do for objects in *Le parti pris des choses*. Her characters frequently wear fur or feathers, but the fabulist's object of study is human nature, not nature per se. Nevertheless, if we pay close attention to the subtle slips of language and description that weave back and forth between animal and human nature, we discover that Marie's fables may act like Ponge's poem objects, which often move imperceptibly between the point of view of things and that of their human manipulators. Marie's *translatio* is not merely linguistic: carrying over from animal to human and human to animal, her translation leads to an exploration of how and when human nature coincides partly, though not completely, with the nature of animals. The *lais* will plumb those depths further, as we shall see.

In the Middle Ages, different modes of thought offer competing perspectives on the relationship between animal and human. In the first account of creation in Genesis 1:20–30, three categories of animals sorted by place—sea, air, and land—precede the creation of man, male and female, made in God's image and given dominion over all animals. In the second version (Gen. 2:18–23), Adam names all the animals, but God finds no mate for man among them and so creates woman from his side to be bone of his bone. Based on these verses,

Christian exegesis from St Augustine's *City of God* (1.20) to Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* (96.1) emphasizes the break between beasts and humans. While Augustine (in accord with philosophical tradition) bases the crucial difference on animals' lack of reason, Aquinas's discussion of Genesis expands the distinction into a graduated series: "Man shares reason with the angels, sense-powers with other animals, natural vital powers with plants, and the body itself with all non-living things."¹² As Jan Ziolkowski points out, "an absolute divide between the human and the animal" is the natural result of medieval theocentrism and anthropocentrism, yet a number of factors problematize any clear boundary: the existence of monstrous races (like dog-headed men) and mixed animal-human forms (like werewolves), as well as the possibility that, even though animals do not have souls, they might in certain circumstances be treated as if they did and thus be excommunicated, converted, preached to, or put on trial for their actions.¹³

So under one light, animal and human may be neatly divided; under another, they overlap and risk confusion; and both views, in defiance of Aristotelian logic, may apply at any given moment. We humans obviously share animals' appetites for food and sex, run the same risk of domination by the strong, experience life as they do within the dimensions of physical bodies, and demonstrate sense and sensibility to some degree. Frequently, Marie's fables describe animal behavior that observation can readily confirm: hunted foxes do show cunning, and they certainly fancy eating poultry, as the *gupil* (who elsewhere takes the name Renart) readily demonstrates to the cock on his dung heap (no. 60). In the *Fables*, the trick is figuring out when the beast mask hides not an(other) animal but only our human self. When do

¹² *Summa Theologica: a concise translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott (Westminster, MD, 1989), pp. 146–47. On Augustine and Aquinas in relation to the treatment of animals in ancient philosophy, see Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca, NY, 1993), pp. 195–207. I would like to thank Susan Crane for these references and also recommend her article "For the Birds," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer: the Yearbook of the New Chaucer Society* 29 (2007), 23–41.

¹³ "Literary Genre and Animal Symbolism," in *Animals and the Symbolic in Medieval Art and Literature*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houven (Groningen, 1997), pp. 1–4 (quotation on p. 1). Cf. Jacques Derrida's interrogation of the animal/human divide in Western tradition, in *L'animal que donc je suis*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris, 2006), pp. 15–77.

Marie's examples seek to push us beyond the limits of our animal half into the province of our potentially reasonable other?

Consider in this respect the last fable, where the question of appetite and aptitude returns, this time in a feminine context.¹⁴ Once again the role of nature is evoked, but here it plays a prominent role in the verbal fabric of both narrative and epimythium. Indeed, Marie's narrator and hen seem to speak with a single voice, drawing their lessons on the unchangeability of nature and custom.

"Nenil, nenil," fet la geline,
 "si devant mei estut une mine
 tuz jurs pleine, pas ne lerreie
 ne pur ceo ne [me] targereie
 que jo ne quesisse tuz jurs plus
 sulunc ma *nature*, sulunc mun *us*."
 Par ceste essample veut mustrer
 que plusurs genz poënt trover
 avoir e ceo quë unt mester,
 mes [il] ne poënt pas changier
 lur *nature* ne lur *usage*;
 tuz jurs coveitent en lur curage. (vv. 15–26, emphasis added)

[“No, no,” says the hen, “if there was placed before me a measure *always* filled, I wouldn’t stop or hesitate to search *every day* for more, according to my *nature* and my *customary use*.” Through this example it can be seen that many people can find possessions and what they need, but they cannot change their *nature* or their *usage*. They will *always* covet in their hearts.]¹⁵

¹⁴ Spiegel contrasts the male world of the first fable with its hierarchies and vanities with the loving female company of the last fable, where Marie's reworking differs from a Latin analogue that emphasizes the insatiability of female lust (“The Male Animal,” pp. 122–3). See also Spiegel, “The Woman’s Voice in the *Fables* of Marie de France,” in *In Quest of Marie de France, A Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantal E. Maréchal (Lewiston, NY, 1992), pp. 45–57.

¹⁵ Marie's generalizations in the epimythium are frequently limited: rather than speak of all men or all women, she tends to limit the claims of type (some women, some men) and thus frequently avoids or downplays the misogyny built into fable by classical authors. See Sahar Amer, “Marie de France Rewrites Genesis: The Image of Woman in Marie de France's *Fables*,” *Neophilologus* 81 (1997), 489–99. In *Esope au féminin: Marie de France et la politique de l'interculturalité* (Amsterdam, 1999), Amer analyzes the flexibility with which Marie treats animals who do not always appear in her collection according to type. As Augustine demonstrates in *De doctrina christiana*, animals (like other signs) have variable meanings and may be treated *in bono* or *in malo*. See D.W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer, A Study in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 295–97; and Francesco Zambon, “*Figura bestialis*: Les fondements théoriques du bestiaire médiéval,” in *Epopée Animale, Fable et Fabliau*, ed. Gabriel Bianciotto and Michel Salvat (Paris, 1984), pp. 709–19.

Both bird and narrator draw their lessons in the realm of nature, which makes a perfect match with human nature. In this last fable, story and lesson fit together so precisely that the gap insinuated in the opening fable stands out all the more starkly by contrast. What then is the proper relation between the natural world of the narrative and the social thrust of the epimythium?

Given the fables' classical heritage, Marie seems to share Aristotle's lesson that man is a social animal.¹⁶ She prefers to emphasize the social ramifications of her tales and frequently avoids moralizing directly on the givens of nature and human nature, despite the ease with which many a fable narrative might produce such a lesson. Such is the case with no. 67, "The Crow who found the feathers of a peacock," where, envious of the peacock's beauty, the crow pulls out all its feathers to cover itself with the peacock's, only to be rejected by the "other" peacocks and killed by the crows, when the species cross-dresser tries to return to its own. Here Marie's moral on those who covet more possessions and honors, yet cannot retain even the ones they have, recalls aspects of both the first and last fables but emphasizes the behavior of groups rather than individual character.

Nevertheless, the topic of nature's limits does surface in a number of fables: within our aviary most particularly in no. 79, "The Hawk and the Owl." While the two birds are gendered masculine in French, they are clearly mothers, excellent friends laying and hatching their eggs together in a single nest. One year, however, the hawk chastises her young for soiling the nest, and they excuse themselves by putting the blame back on her: the mother hawk has given their rear ends brothers ("lur derere unt eü frere," v. 25); the owlets are the ones whose droppings have dirtied the nest.¹⁷ The mother hawk responds by recognizing the limits of nurture in the face of nature's constraints ("nature" and "nureture" are placed at the rhyme for emphasis, vv. 31–32). Corroborating the hawk's view, Marie begins her epimythium

¹⁶ Though much of Aristotle was not available in the 12th century, see Brucker, introduction, pp. 3–11; and Amer, *Esope au féminin*, on Marie's possible links with Jewish, Arab, and oriental fable traditions.

¹⁷ The bad reputation of owls may recall the bestiary's link between the "night bird" and the diabolical (Pierre de Beauvais and Guillaume le Clerc both use anti-Jewish themes to explicate the *nycticorax*). Or it may echo classical associations, available to a courtly public in *Philomena*, Chrétien de Troyes's translation of Ovid's tale from the *Metamorphoses*, where owls and other bad signs announce on the night of Tereus's marriage to Procne the future disasters.

with a proverb (encapsulating common wisdom in a form even more miniaturized than the fables): a sweet apple may roll under a bitter tree but, at the first bite, it can be traced back to the tree where it grew (vv. 33–38). Real identity may be momentarily hidden by a false or misleading appearance, but nature will out in the end. Marie's concluding verses translate further from nature to human nature: a man may turn his nature but no one can completely escape it (vv. 39–40: "Sa nature peot hum guenchir, / mais nul n'en put del tut eissir").

In some contexts, that bite of apple might conjure up Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; it certainly calls attention to a troubling issue that emerges most clearly in those fables where the snug fit between nature and human nature, tale and epimythium, operates on the same model as the closing fable. If nature's constraints establish such firm boundaries for an animal's character and behavior, what happens to the pedagogical aim of the fables as a genre designed to chastise, correct, and improve the humans reading them? Is change really possible in the kind of world the fables construct and, if not, has the fable paradoxically undone its own *raison d'être*? We might postulate answers to those questions from several different angles within the collection.

Consider first the question of "species trouble," to paraphrase Judith Butler,¹⁸ an issue already hinted at in the examples of the crow who would be a peacock (no. 67), the beetle, neither worm nor bird (v. 12), who wants to fly like an eagle but ends up starving to death when he ventures too far from the horse manure he feeds on (no. 74), and the bat who wants above all to take the side of the winners in the battle between the lion king of the four-footed beasts and the eagle king of the birds (no. 23). The bat's mix of physical traits allows her to join the mice, but when she sees how numerous the birds are, she deserts to join the winged creatures and then finds herself rejected by both sides, cursed, and deprived of her plumage (hence her name, *la chauve-souris*, bald mouse).

Although Marie's moral in each of these fables evokes the social dimension of human pretensions and betrayals, the stories themselves leave a strong impression that underlines the problematic nature of border crossings, whether in the difficulties experienced by those whose identity is not easily defined within a single category, or in the troubles encountered when one creature tries to be something or someone

¹⁸ *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990).

other than (its) nature intended. The lesson for human nature remains unexplicated, but the narrative implies that the business of defining exactly where nature places us is not always so obvious. Adam and Eve's bite of the apple opens the choice between good and evil for all humanity and leaves us with the necessity to make choices, exercise reason, the very quality that is supposed to distinguish us from (the rest of) the animals, even if only within the constraints of nature's boundaries, wherever they may be located.

The question of location is precisely the issue raised in another fable that speaks to the possibility or impossibility of change. In no. 80, "The Eagle, the Hawk, and the Crane," an angry eagle sends all the birds to capture a hawk. But when their target hides in the hollow of an oak, they can only besiege the place and wait for the long-beaked crane to probe and pierce his niche. The martial character of the confrontation, built into Marie's choice of words, evokes the sort of quarrel that might break out between a king and one of his powerful barons. But when the crane shoots her beak forward like a lance ("La grüe lance bek avant," v. 13), the hawk suddenly seizes her head, and the register of language falls: the crane has a mishap from the rear ("li mesavient par derere," v. 17), soiling all the animals below. Humiliated, the crane decides to leave the place where her shame ("hunte," v. 27) will be a constant source of reproach, but when crossing the sea, she recounts her "vileinie" (v. 34) to a seagull who counsels her to return home since the "instrument that shamed her" (v. 37) remains in her possession. Marie's moral transposes "cest essample" (v. 45) into human terms by comparing the crane to evil-hearted people who commit wrongs in their own country and then abandon it only to do the same or worse elsewhere. She passes from description to prescription in the last two verses: "Lur mauveis quor deivent changer, / ne mie lur mauveis quor lesser" (vv. 51–52: they should change their bad heart and not leave their ill-intentioned heart to abandon).¹⁹

The play here between place and displacement, position and disposition, cuts to the heart indeed, and not only to the hearts of the creatures described in the narrative and epimythium (which do not quite coincide: the crane seems less evil-intentioned than victim of

¹⁹ My translation follows Brucker's reading of Harley 978. The repetition of *quor*, which appears in only one other manuscript (p. 309, n. 7), is elsewhere replaced by *païs*: "and not abandon their country").

an unfortunate accident, as suggested by the verb *mesavenir*). The possible links or disconnects between where we are and what or who we are remain crucial in evaluating our capacity to change and the fables' ability to help us do so. The heart is a powerful site in medieval usage, entailing not only love, as moderns expect, but memory, understanding, and courage. We learn with our hearts, and our hearts once formed may lead us well or ill, wherever we find ourselves.²⁰

Changing place does not change disposition: this is the conservative message that the *Fables* repeatedly convey (cf. no. 22, "The Hares and the Frogs"). If nature prepares each of us a place that matches who or what we are (creatures of land, sea, or air), its hierarchies "naturalize" society's own. As the wall instructs the vole (no. 73, vv. 75–94), he should not despise his nature and go seeking a wife in high places instead of right next to him with his relative, the little mouse (cf. no. 15, "The Donkey who wants to play with its master"). But what about the movement allowed in the moral on how we may turn from our nature (no. 79)?

Reason says that we humans should be capable of exercising some control over our hearts to learn, improve, and change. Our disposition may be a given, but it is not given as a license. We are caught in the bind of placement, our place in nature, as well as the placement and dispositions of human nature. But sometimes we may just be in the wrong place, as happened to the poor crane or the dirty owlets. When do position and disposition coincide, when do they reasonably part company? Consider no. 66, "The Hawk and the Nightingale," a very short fable that brings together two animals featured in Marie's *Lais*. Here a hawk sits on the same tree where the nightingale has her nest and nurtures her young. While the hawk and owl mothers of no. 79, both hunters, have no trouble forming a friendship, the disproportion between predator and songbird, weak and strong, makes for uneasy proximity. When the hawk commands the nightingale to sing (that is, perform in her most characteristic lyric role), the mother bird cannot do so as long as the hawk stays so close. Let the hawk move to another

²⁰ As Gornemant de Goort counsels Perceval in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*, one can learn anything, when heart, effort, and practice (*us*, v. 1415) work together. Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans*, La Pochothèque (Paris, 1994), vv. 1411–40. Gornemant's *us* is the same word used by the hen for "customary practice" and associated with the epimythium's *usage* (nos 102, 20, 25).

tree and she will sing more beautifully, “as all the birds know” (v. 12). As the narrator extrapolates: where we fear, we cannot speak well.

In this fable, changing places does make a difference, though no change in disposition seems to be in play (cf. no. 62, where a hawk threatens doves momentarily protected by the presence of the eagle king). Is it because no avoidance of disposition is at stake here that displacement matters? Yet the nightingale’s request that the hawk move away, “si vus pleiseit” (v. 9: “if it pleased you”), invites him to curb at least momentarily his ill-intentioned heart.²¹ Even in the wolf-eat-lamb world of the fables,²² being in the wrong place at the wrong time is a danger that occasionally may be avoided, as the lamb learns too late (no. 2, “The Wolf and the Lamb”), but the pregnant sow puts to her advantage (no. 21, “The Wolf and the Sow”). Place and disposition, whether in nature’s determinations or society’s hierarchies, are necessarily linked but not always locked together with no room for turning. The trick is to determine, in any given instance, how much or how far we can curb our “natural” tendencies.

The issue of placement is no less vital in the *Fables*’ operation as a collection. As the reader moves through it, following the play of connections through the displacements of shifting combinations, chains of interconnected fables thus revealed (and continually reordered) yield more and more pleasure but also more information, more possibilities for learning lessons, whether directly in Marie’s epimythia or implicitly inscribed in the dramatic action of her lively narratives. This is equally true of the *Lais*, though without direct lessons in all but the second.²³ Position and disposition function formally in the interplay among the 12 *lais*, thematically within the tales themselves and intertextually with the *Fables*, included in close proximity in Harley 978, where we can once again follow the trail of animals—especially the

²¹ Do wild hawks ever listen to nightingales sing or voluntarily abandon their prey? Perhaps the place to find a precedent for Marie’s hawk is the bestiary rather than the natural world. See Hugh of Fouillois’s opening chapters on doves and hawks (tame and wild), especially the initial illustration, which places dove and hawk together on a single perch (Clark, *The Medieval Book of Birds*, Figs 1a–1f). While the peaceful bird represents the prior Hugh, the other bird represents his addressee, Rainier, a former knight and now a “Lay-brother known as the Kindhearted” (p. 121), a hawk who has indeed learned to tame its predatory instincts.

²² Needler, “The Animal Fable,” pp. 437–38, analyzes the fable’s double perspective: idealizing morality versus dog-eat-dog world.

²³ See Pickens, “Marie de France,” pp. 714–20, on *Equitan*’s intermediary status between fable and *lai*.

flight of birds—to see what more they reveal about nature and human nature in the entanglements of Breton tales.

The question of proximity leads directly to the constellation of three *lais* that feature birds, most particularly to the pivotal “*Laüstic*,” which furnishes a transition between the marvelous treatment of animal-human metamorphosis in *Yonec* and the more naturalistic treatment of the swan messenger in *Milun*. The nightingale is merely a bird, but it carries a heavy burden of figurative associations and literary traditions. In “The Nightingale” (Marie is at pains to translate *Laüstic* into French and English for her Anglo-Norman public), the lovers are able to initiate and maintain their love for a long time because their houses, placed side by side like those of Pyramus and Thisbe, allow married lady and single knight to speak across the space of their facing windows. As in many other *lais*, metonymy and metaphor, each with a distinctive spatial configuration, come together in the figure of the nightingale to produce key actions in the plot as well as an emblematic substitute for the lovers.²⁴ Ovidian allusions with unpromising overtones continue to mark the *lai*’s narrative, as the eponymous bird of the title undergoes a series of changes that play off against Ovid’s tale of *Philomela*, whose victims and perpetrators of monstrous deeds for and against love are all transformed into birds: Tereus the hoopoe, Procne the swallow, and Philomela the nightingale. In Marie’s story, none of the human participants changes form, but the unfortunate nightingale—who goes from singing bird to captured bird, from dead bird to enshrined bird—catches in its bodily transformations the lovers’ own changing reflections. As such, it provides a mirror for the different refractions of animal and human found in *Yonec* and *Milun*.

In *Laüstic*, we may wonder whether killing the bird ends or eternalizes the lovers, whether it functions as a sign of fidelity transcending bodily distance or as a substitute that merely embalms but no longer sustains their love. In other words, how do we read the emblem and the ending? If propinquity initially solves the problem of the lovers’ meeting, does its unhappy side effect, setting them close but always at a distance, foreshadow triumph or failure? Love based on nearness

²⁴ See my discussion of metaphor and metonymy in “Le Fresne’s Model for Twinning in the *Lais* of Marie de France,” *Modern Language Notes* 121 (2006), 946–60; and Jean-Michel Caluwé, “Du chant du rossignol au *Laüstic* de Marie de France: sources et fictions dans le lai,” in *Chant et enchantement au Moyen Âge* (Toulouse, 1997), pp. 182–87.

("ele l'ama sur tute rien, /.../ Tant pur ceo qu'il iert pres de li," vv. 26–28) may not be sufficiently strong to face the test of continual separation, once the nightingale's death prevents their mutual gaze from one window to the other. In probing the semiotic potential of Marie's ending, we need to follow more closely how different combinations of the nightingale's figurative associations align position and disposition in the *lai*.

The evocation of springtime, which initiates many troubadour and trouvère poems, marks the passage here from initial situation to dramatic confrontation. When nature's renewal invites the lovers to share in the joys of flower and bird song, the wife's repeated absences from bed provoke an angry query from her husband. To justify her nightly vigils at the window, she describes with exuberance the joy of listening to the nightingale who sings in the orchard outside the window (vv. 83–90). Metonymic displacement to a bird so metaphorically identified with love and the lover's song is such a thin veil that the jealous husband has no difficulty deciphering the figurative from the literal level. His revenge, however, is phrased in his willingness to take the lady at her word. With trap, net, or snare ("engin, reis u laçun," v. 96), he will have the innocent nightingale caught ("Le laüstic enginera," v. 94), instead of the guilty lover across the way. The bird will shift from bystander to doomed player in the tale, its fate reflected in the fable of the swallow who tried to prevent the sowing of linseed, from whose flax bird snares are made (no. 17). Ovid, too, prepares us for Marie's intertextual linking of nightingale and swallow: while Procne flies away, neither the nightingale nor the lady will escape the husband's trap in *Laüstic*.

Treatises on memory frequently use birds kept in cages to signify the action of storing memories, but the lady's husband has no intention of memorializing love.²⁵ He shows his wife the trapped nightingale only to break its neck and toss it against her breast right above her heart. Readers may recognize a repeat of Philomela's revenge,

²⁵ Logan E. Whalen, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (Washington, DC, 2008), p. 87, makes the connection between birds in these *lais* and medieval memory systems and points to Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1992). In Fig. 27, she shows a manuscript page from a book of hours, where a border of birds caged and penned clearly represents the notion that "[b]irds, like memories, need to be hunted down...or stored up in a cage or coop" (p. 238). Carruthers also analyzes the use of summary pictures, like the dove and hawk illustration mentioned above (*Book of Memory*, pp. 239–42).

when she throws Ithys's bloody head against his father's chest, once Tereus has consumed the rest of his son at the horrid feast Procne prepared to avenge her sister's rape.²⁶ We may recognize as well the lady's weakness and vulnerability, her subjection to the husband's authority and aggressive power, figured in the little bird's fragility ("le cors petit," v. 121). He controls her body, sexuality, and pleasure, even if he cannot control her heart. The lady herself, like the nightingale, could speak only of love, could not not speak of love, however much she intended to hide it. She too has set a trap, but in words that catch herself. Once any diversion to the nightingale has been eliminated by her husband's villainous actions, she will have to act as if the literal meaning of her speech was all she meant: silenced like the nightingale, robbed of any figurative flight of meaning, the lady no longer has any reason to gaze from her window.

But if the dead bird signifies the end of nightly visits with her lover, she will nevertheless send the knight one last message to correct the unintended signifier her absence risks expressing. The bird's dead body wrapped in a gold cloth—"all written" ("tut escrit," v. 136), like Philomela's tapestry, with the adventure—will signal not the lady's sudden absence of love but the impossibility of sharing it. The voiceless bird will no longer sing, but its corpse, so beautifully adorned, tells a story. The knight enshrines the dead bird in a small vessel forged of gold with precious stones (no rooster he!). With lid sealed, the "chasse" (v. 155), the small casket or coffer "that he always has carried with him" (v. 156), resembles a reliquary for saintly remains. Can the nightingale's body activate a saint's vivifying powers to keep love alive?

The lady and the knight will no longer share the same location; the end of propinquity signals the end of one kind of contiguity and sets in motion a new combination of metonymy and metaphor. While the live bird was a too transparent metaphor for the lover and their joy, the dead bird now serves as substitute by displacement for the ever-absent lady. A new couple has formed—or, rather, two new couples. First, the bejeweled casket made with one part contributed by the lady, inside another contributed by the man: the enclosure suggests a kind of union the lovers themselves could never achieve. Second, knight

²⁶ The husband's action may also echo stories of the eaten heart familiar in troubadour lyric and romance. See Simon Gaunt, *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature: Martyrs to Love* (Oxford, 2006), ch. 3.

and emblem form a couple, as the artful casket remains always near by, contiguous to his person. Does it signify both lovers or just the lady, now transformed into a faraway love? Or have the lovers ceased to be themselves as lovers, just as the nightingale who died in their place ceased to be a living embodiment of joy? Is it love or just the memory of love that can be preserved? The ambiguities of Marie's ending do not resolve the questions, and different readers will no doubt interpret according to their own sense of optimism or pessimism about the capacity of love to survive distance and separation. The dead bird's body disappears into its golden shrine, while the lovers' story escapes to circulate elsewhere in other places, until it reaches Marie, who turns it into her own *objet d'art*. Fascinated by her verbal fashioning, we may be ensnared more by her art than by the lovers themselves: lady and knight remain nameless, while their story has taken on the name and signature of the nightingale whose innocent demise for the sake of love has transformed it from a creature of nature, caught in the cycle of life and death, to a time resistant symbol caught by the esoteric yet mnemonic power of human writing.

Birdcatchers are again on the program when we turn for a moment from *Laüstic* to *Milun*, as the next tale introduces a swan who for 20 years flies faithfully back and forth between two lovers. Its limited but important role in the plot begins when Milun sends a messenger to present a pet swan to his lady, now married to another man. The messenger claims to be a birdcatcher ("Jeo sui uns hum de tel mester, / D'oiseus prendre me sai aidier," vv. 182–83), trying to secure the protection needed to operate in the country. Once the gift has been accepted and a hidden letter found, the narrative will concentrate on the details of how to alternately feed and starve the swan so that it will act like a carrier pigeon flying between master and mistress (thus guarding the secret of their love from prying eyes and ears).²⁷ Such details of animal training were well known to Marie's aristocratic readers who hunted with trained birds and dogs (as *Guigemar* and *Bis-clavret* attest). Though swans, like nightingales, offer some potential for symbolic resonance, traditional symbolism associated, for example, with the swan's dying song in bestiaries and lyric, is here unexploited,²⁸

²⁷ Cf. the little dog in *La Chastelaine de Vergy*, who signals the lovers' rendezvous and keeps their secret secure until the knight reveals it to his lord.

²⁸ For other possible associations with the swan (hermaphroditic or phallic form, doubles, etc.), see Rupert T. Pickens, "The Poetics of Androgyny in the *Lais* of Marie

which leads June Hall McCash to suggest that in *Milun*, Marie demonstrates her awareness of a new, more scientific interest in the direct observation of nature associated with the 12th-century renaissance and the school of Chartres.²⁹

Certainly, in the six *lais* where beasts play a significant role, Marie deploys a striking variety of uses for her animal characters and many different strategies for representing their relationship to humans. Indeed, the prologue to *Milun* insists on the diversity of her stories, as well as the diversity of approaches required to please her public. Among the 12 *lais* of the collection, there are many recurrent patterns, yet every one of the tales is distinct within the set of 12, especially for readers who take the time to reflect on and through the regular interplay of recurring elements. The trio of birds that link the 6th, 7th, and 8th tales establishes an intense focus on successive avian incarnations, as well as the interactions among them. But as we pivot back through the figure of the nightingale to explore the animal transformations in *Yonec*, the hawk-knight also points us back to the 4th lay's werewolf, Bisclavret.³⁰

Two tales of shape-shifting, but this is a reprise with a difference. By including both *Yonec* and *Bisclavret* in her collection, Marie probes more deeply the conjunction between human and beast to explore another facet of human doubleness: created with the animals, we are nevertheless linked to the divine. The choice of animal other plays an important role here. In the world of the *Fables*, hawk and wolf are more or less equivalent predators.³¹ In the *Lais*, one is feared and hunted, the other potentially admired by equally predatory aristocrats,

de France: *Yonec*, *Milun*, and the General Prologue," in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture, Selected Papers from the Seventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA, 27 July–1 August 1992*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 211–19; Marie-Noëlle Toury, "Le bestiaire de Marie de France dans les *Lais*," *Revue de littérature française et comparée* 5 (1995), 15–18, here 16.

²⁹ "The Swan and the Nightingale: Natural Unity in a Hostile World in the *Lais* of Marie de France," *French Studies* 49 (1995), 385–96. Cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf," in *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York, 2001), pp. 77–111.

³⁰ Guigemar's antlered white hind, a beast with magical powers able to foretell the hero's future, may also allude to tales of shape-shifting between stag or doe and fairy. In "A Welsh Motif in Marie's 'Guigemar,'" *Studies in Philology* 39 (1942), 12, Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr., cites a number of examples from Stith Thompson's *Motif-index of folk-literature*.

³¹ Pickens, "Marie de France," p. 721: "L'autour est l'équivalent aviaire du loup."

who can identify such a noble bird with their own courtly pastimes (cf. how Lanval's lady appears at his trial: followed by a greyhound and carrying a sparrowhawk on her wrist). In "Human Animals in Medieval Fables," Joyce E. Salisbury notes the greater role given to noble animals in medieval fable, used as a tool in the service of the hierarchical status quo that reflects the interests of both clerical and courtly publics.³² But she also points out the contrast between animals on the top of the food chain, for example lions and eagles, generally shown sympathetically (though they require lessons on just rule), and wolves who "become a metaphor for nobility gone astray" (p. 53). When these same animals appear in the *lais*, they inevitably trail behind them a variety of associations from clerical and popular, Latin and vernacular traditions.³³

The knight who regularly disappears from human society to turn into a wolf three days a week risks sinking into the most repugnant and beast-like characteristics we possess as part of our dual nature, crystallized at its most frightening in the image of the werewolf, the "beste sauvage" (v. 9) described at the beginning of Marie's *lai* who devours people and does great harm (v. 11). We humans frequently project on to animals precisely those parts of ourselves that we find most unacceptable: by labeling such conduct as bestial (with all the charge of emotion such a term carries), we seek to eliminate from our own image monstrous acts that frequently lie outside the ken of real beasts.³⁴ The paradox here is that Marie's werewolf, whose metamorphosis is presented as real and recurrent, turns out to be a man as noble in nature as his social status implies he should be. He is fully capable of controlling, if not the metamorphosis itself, at least the effects of his animal self. Even in wolf form, whether hunted by dogs or accepted at the king's court as dog-like pet, this werewolf exercises reason. So the courtiers themselves believe, even when the wolf acts precisely like a beast and bites off his wife's nose.

³² In *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Nona C. Flores (New York, 1996), pp. 49–65.

³³ On the multiple strands woven together in the image of the hawk, see McCash, "The Hawk-Lover in Marie de France's *Yonec*," *Medieval Perspectives* 6 (1991), 67–75.

³⁴ Mary Midgley, "Beasts, Brutes and Monsters," in *What is an Animal?* ed. Tim Ingold (London, 1988), 35–46.

The plot's unfolding reverses our expectations and reveals that the real beast here, humanly speaking, is the supposedly loving wife who betrays her husband in a monstrous act of treason that upsets the most basic principles of conjugal, as well as feudal, loyalty, trust, and fidelity. She gives birth accordingly to a line of potentially noseless females who carry the same bestial inclination in their nature. Of course, only some of those descendants ("Plusurs des femmes del lignage," v. 312) are born without noses, a subtle reminder that the continuing duality of human nature still leaves open the choice of good and evil handed down by Adam and Eve to both men who can turn into wolves and women who might cut off their noses (however indirectly) to spite their faces.³⁵

When Bisclavret's ex-wife confesses under torture the truth of the wolf's identity and turns over the clothes that permit his return to human form, the beast refuses to take any notice of them. Too ashamed to change in front of others his "semblance de beste" (v. 286), his beastly appearance or his form as beast, he needs privacy to become a man, dressed once again in the sign of human identity. The key word here, *semblance*, also takes a turn in describing the wife's offspring, recognizable "in appearance and face" ("del semblant e del visage," v. 311). "Semblance" suggests that exterior form may either hide or reveal one's true self. It is surface and yet potentially something deeper than mere façade. When the same word *semblance* and its many variations repeatedly resurface in *Yonec*, the verbal network provides a key to what brings together two tales of metamorphosis (two explorations of semblance and resemblance, physical form, and ontological identity), while at the same time introducing between them a significant shift in the examination of human nature's multiple dimensions.³⁶

These two forms of animal-human metamorphosis point first to the question of nomenclature, a powerful indicator of their difference. Just as Adam had names for all the animals, languages have a word for werewolf—and Marie's prologue supplies translations into Breton and Norman French, although she subsequently uses only the Breton form

³⁵ See Bruckner, "Of Men and Beasts in *Bisclavret*," *Romanic Review* 81 (1991), 251–69.

³⁶ In *Yonec*, variations on *semblance*, *semblant*, and *sembler* are scattered from the wife's lament through the second prophecy of Muldumarec: vv. 79, 110, 161, 181, 227, 247, 258, 272, and 322.

as both common and proper names, slipping back and forth between a very human Bisclavret and his werewolf alter ego. Muldumarec is a knight who repeatedly changes into a bird, but there is no term in common language for his metamorphosis. We cannot fit it into a long tradition of worrying about the interface between our animal and human selves. Does this mean that the human-hawk transformations do not touch man's essential nature, as do stories of werewolves? We need to consider more data before answering, especially in light of Muldumarec's ability to assume his lady's *semblance* (v. 161).

Indeed, close examination of Marie's *lai* suggests that metamorphosis is as important for the lady as it is for her lover, though in her case it plays out more figuratively than literally. It might even be argued that the *lai* is more interested in the series of changes triggered in the *mal mariée* than in Muldumarec's actual metamorphoses. As the title indicates, the knight is not the ultimate focus of the adventure: *Yonec* culminates in the son produced by the hawk-knight's union with the lady, the final transformation of their mutual love—hence the importance of the couple and the lady's changing forms from wife to beloved to mother. Imprisoned for seven years by her jealous old spouse, the still childless lady prefers a quick death to continued life with a husband who must have been baptized in Hell. But when spring returns, she remembers the old stories people tell of knights who find noble and beautiful damsels, and ladies who find handsome, courtly, and valiant lovers. Her wish for such an adventure underlines the extent to which here, as in *Guigemar*, nature is out of kilter: in the first *lai* because of Guigemar's lack of interest in love, here because of the mismatch between young and old, noble and ignoble. An animal reminder logically plays a crucial role when nature requires humans to properly realign sexuality and the sexes.

The lady's prayer to God completed, she sees the shadow of a great bird at her narrow window, which she follows with her gaze. "Ostur sembla" (v. 110): it seemed to be a hawk and, as she looked intently, "it became a handsome and noble knight" (v. 115). This is indeed the kind of man she desires, but the unusual arrival occasions some understandable fear. Before following the resolution of her qualms, we need to reflect briefly on the plot necessity of giving Muldumarec the power of flight. A lady imprisoned in a tower obviously presents a challenge for her would-be lover. Is his bird transformation a mere trick of the plot to bring them together or something more significant? Two Celtic stories that probably furnished source material for Marie's *lai* involve

supernatural lovers in the form of a bird-man; in neither is the type of bird specified.³⁷ So we may reasonably interrogate Marie's decision to make her knight metamorphose into a hawk. What kind of meanings would such a *semblance* invite?

Inasmuch as Muldumarec is the king of his country, Marie might have chosen the eagle by analogy. In fables, the eagle is the king and noblest of birds (e.g. no. 46), the hawk merely his seneschal (no. 62). By contrast, when the hawk is chosen by the doves as their king, based on his ability to defend them well and do the least amount of harm (no. 19, "The King of the Doves," vv. 3–4), he shows himself to be an unreliable ruler who devours his subjects and carries out openly what he previously did only with deception. While Marie's moral lesson falls on people who choose bad lords, the hawk's conduct recalls his equally negative role in nos 62 and 66. Of course, the same animal may signify in many different ways, positively or negatively. Since hawks are not only wild creatures but also domesticated servants of men—and women—they have the advantage of being a regular part of the aristocratic world in which Marie's characters live, a hunting bird identified with its pleasures, a courtly accoutrement connoting nobility. Significantly, when the lady sees the hawk appear at her window, the narrator mentions the jesses tied to its feet: they are the sign of a tamed bird who has subordinated its predatory instincts to his mistress's command.³⁸ Moreover, this particular kind of hawk, *ostur*, is the goshawk, the largest of the species and in this case a fully grown bird of five or six moltings (v. 111), plainly in its youthful prime and worthy of love. This bird's "semblance" already figures the perfect match of knight and lady.

The marvelous element in Breton tales connects the knight's metamorphosis to magic and fairy power. Indeed, when the lady follows Muldumarec to his domain, Marie's narrative includes many traits that point to the Other World of Celtic myth (the underground passage through the hill, the city of silver, etc.), even though later in the tale, when she returns there with husband and son, the same kingdom will be seamlessly connected with the geography of their journey from home to court. As in *Lanval* and many anonymous *lais*, we can

³⁷ R.N. Illingworth, "Celtic Tradition and the *Lai* of Yonec," *Etudes celtiques* 9 (1961), 510–20.

³⁸ Muldumarec's predatory (and aristocratic) instincts will resurface in the son's assignment of future vengeance.

see here the recurring theme of supernatural and mortal unions, the medieval fascination with the mystery of how human nature interacts physically and psychologically with something beyond the natural. In *Yonec*, these Celtic elements are skillfully woven into the Christian context within which her characters function: Muldumarec recites the *credo* and takes communion to allay the lady's fears. When he predicts the birth of their child, the scene echoes the Annunciation to the Virgin.³⁹

But at first glance, the hawk-knight's metamorphosis suggests the troubling appearance of diabolical powers. In the *City of God* (18.18), St Augustine warned that animal-human metamorphosis is simply an illusion, the devil's work.⁴⁰ While his transformation entails secrets which remain obscure ("li segrei vus sunt obscur," v. 123), Muldumarec insists that the goshawk is a noble bird (v. 122) whose love merits the lady's own, without endangering her soul. The choice of animal here has ramifications not only for the social status of Muldumarec; it introduces further symbolic meanings associated with birds and triggered explicitly by the narrative's Christian elements. Birds are traditionally identified with spiritual things, thoughts and memories that must be captured before they fly away, the flight of the human soul toward the divine.⁴¹ Muldumarec's links with the supernatural, recontextualized in Marie's tale within a Christian perspective, point toward the duality of human beings created in God's image: we are a mix of animal and divine elements not easily managed or understood.

If the traditional werewolf represents a kind of monstrous and threatening hybridity, whose contamination Bisclavret's wife greatly fears (only to fall into bestial conduct herself), once proven a good Christian by accepting the body of Christ, "le cors Damedeu" (v. 162) administered in communion, the bird-man in *Yonec* escapes the negative views associated with bird-women, sirens, or harpies who appear in the medieval bestiary to charm and kill their male victims.⁴² Perhaps paradoxically, the Christian connection serves to highlight the role of

³⁹ The specific language used to describe his arrival at the window, seen first as a shadow, "umbre" is one of the figures (which goes back to Luke 1:35) used in medieval explanations of how the Virgin conceives with the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁰ See Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Métamorphose et bestiaire fantastique au moyen âge* (Paris, 1985), pp. 11–12.

⁴¹ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 246–47.

⁴² See Florence McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1962), pp. 166–71.

the body within a spiritual context. The mystery of transubstantiation—the wine and bread transformed into the blood and body of Christ (vv. 184–88)—plays off against Muldumarec's change of *semblance* into that of the lady, in order to receive the "*corpus domini*" (v. 186).⁴³ Consider the puzzle of how their two bodies, now side by side in the lady's bed (vv. 166–68), fuse into one when the lady—or is it Muldumarec in her *semblance*?—pretends to faint ("Semblant fist," v. 181), so that the old woman who guards her will bring in the priest, despite her husband's absence. Where are the precise limits between the lady and the bird-man, between body and spirit, between semblance and resemblance? In pagan mythologies, metamorphosis takes place precisely because the boundaries between gods, animals, humans, and even plants are imprecise and permeable, their links inscribed in the double nature of being.⁴⁴ How does this resonate in *Yonec*'s hybrid mix of Christian and Breton threads?

Humans have physical bodies in common with the animals but spirit, soul, and reason in common with angels, those other flying creatures. The lady's *semblance* includes her physical appearance but also her nature as a human being who takes shape in a body that reflects her state of mind.⁴⁵ Faded after seven years of marriage, she will now regain her youthful beauty as fulfillment of her desire finds expression in the return of her physical form to its natural loveliness. The joy of seeing her hawk-lover whenever she wants to effects a complete change in her "*semblanz*" (v. 227), which her jealous husband readily observes. Muldumarec warned the lady to observe "*mesure*" (v. 201), reasonable limits, in order to avoid betrayal by the old lady, who like a hunter after her prey will track and spy on them ("*nus gaitera*," v. 204). In that admonition, the lover spoke not only like the troubadour who associates *fin'amor* with *mezura* but also like a preacher who warns the Christian sinner that reason must control the body's urging, the animal side of human nature.

⁴³ The doctrine of real, not figurative, change between body and bread was a subject of debate among theologians in the 12th century. See Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), on the Eucharist as a form of cannibalism (pp. 1, 30, 275, 412, n. 77).

⁴⁴ Harf-Lancner, *Métamorphose*, pp. 4–5.

⁴⁵ In *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (New York, 1992), Elisabeth Bronfen discusses the psychoanalytic notion of the symptom as both denial and acknowledgment, the body's expression of what we cannot know (e.g. pp. x–xi).

But how much lies within the mind's control when love makes the body flower, just as the month of April makes birds sing (vv. 51–52)? Is the lady guilty of excessive desire? Is she, like the lady in *Laiüstic*, too quick to speak her love, even if she does so through body language rather than speech? There, an innocent nightingale dies; here, the lover himself pays the price of her joy. He predicted that her appearance would be lethal for them: “Vostre semblanz nus ocireit” (v. 322). But even knowing that her coming into bloom leads to his own death, Muldumarec comforts the lady (vv. 325, 400). His sympathy, shared by the narrator, suggests that the body naturally seeks and expresses, voluntarily and involuntarily, the fruits of love, just as the hawk-lover responded to his beloved's call and could only come if she called. The goodness of creation in the biblical account, sustained for Christian theology by Augustine's rejection of Manichaeism, includes the body as well as the spirit. It finds expression in the command that humans multiply. As nature intends then (and despite the misalliance with her old husband), the lady's body will be transformed by pregnancy; she will become a mother by giving birth to their son, her comfort after the lover's death (v. 329).

Muldumarec's sacrifice for love (whose Christian overtones are inescapable in the tapestry of Marie's text) nevertheless sounds a somber note. The body is inevitably linked to suffering as well as joy, death as well as life. Ironically, the bird of prey will himself become the object of the bird hunter's trap, mortally wounded by the sharp iron barbs the husband has installed in his wife's window frame. Compelled to follow the bird-man whose wound has forced him to return to his marvelous castle, the lady leaps (Tristan-like) out of her tower, guided by the traces of Muldumarec's blood, which flows abundantly through Marie's text.⁴⁶ She passes into a city where not a single man or woman appears, enters the castle, and sees two other knights sleeping in chambers⁴⁷ before she finds her dying lover and receives his last prophecy and gifts: the tunic, ring, and sword guarantee her safe return and eventual revenge for her lover's death. At the abbey where they happen upon the king's tomb, the lady tells her son their story,

⁴⁶ vv. 316, 334, 342, 348, 357, 359, 373, 378.

⁴⁷ In “Bisclavret et Muldumarec: La part de l'ombre dans les *Lais*,” in *Amour et merveille: Les Lais de Marie de France, Etudes recueillies par Jean Dufournet* (Paris, 1995), Jeanne-Marie Boivin explores the mythical overtones of sleep, dream, and awakening (pp. 147–68).

and Yonec kills his false father with the hawk-knight's own weapon. His mother, who fainted repeatedly during and after her last moments with Muldumarec (vv. 323, 396, 449–51), now faints gently into death (vv. 540–41), and the reunited lovers are buried together in the same sarcophagus. When the son takes his father's place as the long-awaited king, the strength of their love endures triumphantly into the next generation, as their final reunion mirrors by contrast the nightingale's reliquary in *Laüstic*.

Throughout *Yonec*'s closing events, the body plays an insistent role, passes through different states—fleeing and following, waking and sleeping, conscious and unconscious, dead and alive, in bed and in the grave—as if the narrative searches agonizingly through the lady's experience, as well as the knight's, to find out what happens to the body when the spirit flies away, when the body goes in pursuit of the winged flight of memory, the animated idea of love. Is the *semblance* merely a physical form or does it retain some stronger link to the self? What does the Christian body become when the soul departs? The questions raised by Marie's tale echo a shift in emphasis found in the bestiary tradition's commentary on the phoenix, the bird who renews its own life in the fire of its death and rebirth. In the *Aberdeen Bestiary*, the mystical explanations found in *Physiologus*, based on Christ's dual nature and limited to his resurrection, take a turn toward moral instruction in the 12th-century gloss, which applies the example of the phoenix to mankind's bodily resurrection after death separates body and soul, thus “assuag[ing] fears concerning the fate of the human body after its deposit in the grave.”⁴⁸

Marie's *lai* is no bestiary gloss, but her exploration of the hawk-knight's metamorphosis and his lady's corresponding transformations, triggered by the joy of shared love and experienced in a very physical form, may similarly reflect the concerns of a public anxious about finding and transcending the limits of the self, the duality of human kind, and the inevitability of death. Respect for nature and human nature in Marie's courtly and Christian context requires an exploration of the entire spectrum of our identity as body, spirit, soul, animal, and human created in the image of God.

⁴⁸ According to Debra Hassig, this phoenix “would have been perceived by medieval readers as support for the dogma of the resurrection of the flesh, in line with contemporary theological opinion.” Cited by Lisa Verner in *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2005), p. 104.

I conclude here with a brief return to the issue of truth claims, since those associated with the *lais* seem to differ radically from those of the *Fables* and thus cast a different light on the animal characters who perform in the narratives. In the prologue to *Guigemar*, Marie tells us that she is going to recount stories that she knows to be true (v. 19), about which the Bretons have composed *lais*. The motif is repeated in the epilogue of *Bisclavret* (vv. 315–16), and similarly, in the prologue to *Eliduc*, Marie promises to tell us the truth of an ancient Breton tale:

D'un mult ancïen lai bretun
 Le cunte e tute la reisun
 Vus dirai si cum jeo entent
 La verité mun escient. (vv. 1–4)⁴⁹

The way modern editors choose to punctuate this introduction produces several different ways of understanding the passage and thus uncovers its syntactical ambiguity. Does the phrase “as I understand it” (“si cum jeo entent”) apply to the three possible objects for “vus dirai”: I shall tell you, as I understand it, the story, explanation, and truth? In this case, truth belongs (as in the previous examples) to the adventure itself. Or should we rather attach only “verité” to the verb “entent” and anticipate that Marie’s sense of truth here is hers, the product of her understanding or intent?

As with the surplus of meaning caught in the grammatical ambiguities of the General Prologue (vv. 9–22), truth appears to oscillate between the source and the receiver/transmitter. The slippage is reminiscent of the subtle glide back and forth between animal and human traits represented in the fables. In either case, we are simultaneously invited to depend on what Marie gives us to be the truth and forced to evaluate the nature or credibility of her claim. Indeed, the threshold of credibility becomes crucial when animals begin to speak in the *Lais*, or change into humans, since otherwise beasts appear in this context only to be themselves, instruments of human domination as prescribed by

⁴⁹ I removed the commas from Rychner’s edition so readers can see how the translation will change depending on where they are placed. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, trans., *The Lais of Marie de France*, 2nd ed. (London, 1999; 1986), p. 111 (based on Alfred Ewert’s edition): “I shall tell you the story and the whole substance of a very old Breton lay, in so far as I understand the truth of it.” Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1990), p. 271, vv. 3–4 (based on Karl Warnke’s edition): “Je vais vous faire le récit / d’un très ancien lai breton / et je vous en dirai l’histoire / et toute la vérité, comme je crois savoir.”

Genesis. Theological views reject the possibility that humans can really turn into animals, but in Marie's "translation" of popular Breton tales, characters as well as readers encounter materials formed outside clerical purview.⁵⁰ How literally, or not, should we understand the truth she translates? In what dimension might the marvels of Celtic lore convey truth(s)?⁵¹ It may be difficult for us moderns to gauge what medieval readers believed, but it seems likely that a sophisticated, courtly public, like a critically inclined modern audience, would most likely have included a spectrum of possible reactions to tales of were-wolves, hawk-knights, and prophetic deer. In search of the figurative truths of fable and fiction or the literal truth of lived human experience, we can be sure that Marie invites her readers to seek meaning in the rich obscurities of her *lais*, as in the tensions between narrative and morality staged in her *Fables*. Speaking or speechless, her animals have many a tale to tell us humans.

⁵⁰ See Harf-Lancner, *Métamorphose*, pp. 3–25; and Bynum, "Metamorphosis."

⁵¹ As suggested by *Eliduc's* weasel, this question applies in the domains of the Christian miraculous, the magical, and the scientific as well. Pierre de Beauvais's bestiary, filled with allegorical and moralizing explanations, includes "the old belief that the weasel can revive its dead young offspring" (McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin*, p. 187). But in the *Livre du trésor*, Brunetto Latini takes a more scientific approach, questioning the claim that the weasel conceives through the ear and gives birth through the mouth ("already refuted by Aristotle," McCulloch, p. 187) but including the weasel's resuscitation of her young, while specifying that the "medicine" involved remains unknown (in *Jeux et Sapience du Moyen Age*, ed. Albert Pauphilet [Paris, 1960], p. 809). Cf. Richard de Fournival's weasel, who becomes a model for the lady to revive her dying lover (*Li bestiaires d'amours di maistre Richart de Fournival e Li response du Bestiaire*, ed. Cesare Segre [Milan, 1957], p. 53). In relation to the "truth" of a tale that combines secular and spiritual love, how might medieval readers interpret the weasel's red flower, used in *Eliduc* to revive her companion: marvel, magic, miracle, or medicine? In Marie's *lai*, as in the bestiary tradition, the weasel retains its life-giving power, even if it does so to very different effect. Cf. McCash, "The Curse of the White Hind and the Cure of the Weasel: Animal Magic in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*, pp. 199–209.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MARIE DE FRANCE AND THE FABLE TRADITION

Charles Brucker

Introduction

For a long time, the name of Marie de France was attached exclusively to the *Fables*. It seems that this prejudice was due to Claude Fauchet, the great scholar of the French Renaissance. From the Romantic period onward, the *Fables* of Marie have suffered from their comparison with the *Lais*,¹ which, thanks to their imaginative and poetic power (borrowed in part from Celtic literature), had the ability to transport the public, no matter what epoch the reader belonged to, into the worlds of faerie. Fables belong by definition to a genre where moralization is of central importance, though this is far from excluding sensitivity and poetry. It is Marie who composes the fables, and she has the gift of submitting her sensitivity² and her poetical vision to a tradition which has its roots far back in classical antiquity, without thereby renouncing her personality or her own ideas about social and political life.

The Aesopic fable is a fiction which by means of a brief narrative transposes actions attributed to human beings into a parallel world, in this case the world of the animals. In Marie de France, the narrative is almost always followed by a moral reflection which draws a lesson meant for human beings from the experience or the adventure

¹ This prejudice lasted until the 18th century. It was only in the 19th century that medieval studies were reborn in a new and more objective perspective. We should also note that the *Lais*, because of their "lyrical" character, attracted the attention of the critics of the Romantic period much more strongly than the *Fables*.

² This is the sensitivity of a woman. Mary addressed a public from which women were certainly not absent. On this question, see Harriet Spiegel, "The Woman's Voice in the Fables of Marie de France," in *In Quest of Marie de France. A Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantal A. Maréchal (Lewiston, NY, 1992), pp. 45–58. She demonstrates convincingly that it is indeed *as a woman* that Marie expresses herself and that she clearly lays claim to this originality. In this context, Spiegel rightly quotes (p. 57) the epilogue, where we read the very significant verse 8: "cil fet que fol ki sei ublie" [He who lets himself fall into oblivion does a poor job].

of the animal character. It is sometimes preceded by a *promythium*, a short preamble which can be reduced to one verse or a half-verse. In other words, this is an *incipit*, and it is precisely at the beginning and at the end of her fable that Marie de France reveals her personality and presence,³ despite a whole tradition that weighed down upon the medieval fable.

I. *Exempla and fables: A problem of genre*

Already in antiquity, the genre of fable was closely related to that of the *exemplum*—if indeed it is possible to speak of a “genre” in the latter case. Like the fable, the *exemplum* is one type of figurative narration. In medieval rhetoric, the *exemplum* (or, in Greek, the *paradeigma*, “example, model to be followed”) became a means to persuade the hearers, especially in sermons and in moral or moralizing written texts. The *exemplum*, in keeping with its past and its tradition, may concern an action or a word which is attributed to an authority who is certain and who is capable of playing the role of guarantor in a judicial discourse. For example (to mention only the genre of oratory in antiquity), such authorities might be Cicero and Demosthenes, who were past masters in this field.⁴ In the end, the *exempla* took on the appearance of anecdotes and were one of the fundamental elements of the “mirrors of princes,”⁵ treatises that were written for the education of princes and were obliged by definition to present models of government and of political conduct; and in fact, the Aesopic fable of Marie de France has certain affinities to this genre.⁶ This is already indicated clearly by the Prologue to the Fables.⁷ The *exemplum* is a short story

³ Hans R. Runte has shown how “Marie imposes her presence by means of an incontestable ‘I’”: “Marie de France dans ses Fables,” in Maréchal, *In Quest of Marie de France*, pp. 28–44, at p. 29.

⁴ The specifically medieval *exemplum* developed around the 11th and 12th centuries among the Cistercians; see Claude Brémond, Jacques Le Goff, and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L’“exemplum,”* (Turnhout, 1982), p. 50. This period coincides with the expansion of the bestiaries (the *Physiologus*; Philippe de Thaon).

⁵ See Peter von Moos, *Geschichte als Topik: Das rhetorische Exemplum von der Antike zur Neuzeit und die “Historiae” im Policraticus Johannis von Salisbury*, (Ordo) 2, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim, 1996), on the fable, pp. 53 and 56.

⁶ This is proved by the very large number of *incipit* in Marie’s fables which include the term *essample*. See the excellent study by Runte, “Marie de France dans ses Fables,” pp. 28–44.

⁷ See my chapter in this volume, “The Fables of Marie de France and the Mirror of Princes.”

where the “figurative narrative”⁸ has a minimum length and a minimal allegorization, inasmuch as one or another property, quality, or defect is ineluctably linked to one particular animal, and in the short story which is the *exemplum*, a figurative meaning is bestowed in advance on such a person or animal, since it is regarded as providing a model. Thus, in the *Disciplina clericalis* of Pedro Alfonso (Petrus Alphonsi), as soon as the fox—considered the most intelligent and cunning of all the animals—makes its appearance, the reader expects an action or a word that will stimulate his reflection and point it in a somewhat surprising direction. In Example no. 4 (“The Fable of the Mule and the Fox”),⁹ a fox finds a new-born mule in a field and tries to trap him with a question: “Do you have a father or a mother?” The mule—though he symbolizes stupidity—replies: “My uncle is a noble horse,” avoiding saying that his father is a donkey, the animal that was considered utterly repulsive. In short, “the meaning is laid down in advance.”¹⁰

In the fable, the example is no longer isolated. It is inserted into a discourse that is more or less detailed,¹¹ i.e. a narrative that must identify the analogy between the animal and the human being. On the level of the structure of the fable, this entails a certain autonomy,¹² which can be observed precisely in the fables of Marie de France, but is not always found in the Latin fables.¹³ And, the fable is part of a collection.

⁸ See the essay by Armand Strubel, “Exemple, fable, parabole: le récit bref figuré au Moyen Âge,” *Moyen Âge* 94 (1988), 342–61.

⁹ *The Scholar's Guide: A Translation of the Twelfth-Century Disciplina Clericalis of Pedro Alfonso*, trans. Joseph R. Jones and John. E. Keller (Toronto, 1969), p. 47.

¹⁰ Strubel, “Exemple,” p. 347.

¹¹ This is also the case with the *exemplum* of Thomas of Cantimpré, *Les Exemples du Livre des Abeilles*, trans. Henri Platelle (Turnhout, 1997), which, while eliminating the animal world, is close to metaphor and often brings greatly amplified descriptions of the circumstances. Each *exemplum* ends with a conclusion that is close to the moral reflection of the fable; the author's personal point of view can make itself felt strongly, as in *exemplum* 144 (p. 192).

¹² See Strubel, “Exemple,” p. 347. He shows well how the moral reflection and the *promythium* (where this is found) are detached from the body of the narrative. This is one reason why we shall examine closely the narrative as Marie envisages it. Furthermore, the *incipit* and the *epimythia* reveal the real presence of Marie as author. Runte studies these carefully, paying particular attention to the “I” which can be discerned here (“Marie de France dans ses Fables,” esp. pp. 34–35).

¹³ The title or subtitle of the Latin fable “commands” in a certain sense the sequence of events in the narrative. We see this in Fable II, 16, “Graculus superbus et Pavo,” of the *Romulus* of Nilant in comparison with Marie's Fable 67: see Léopold Hervieux, ed., *Les Fabulistes latins, depuis le siècle d'Auguste jusqu'à la fin du Moyen Âge*, 2 vols (Paris, 1884; 2nd ed., 5 vols, 1883–89; New York, 1972), 1884 ed., 2:239. The fable of *Romulus* has a *promythium*: “Ne quis de alienis magnum se proferat bonis (suoque modico potius oportet ut ornetur), ne turpis sit, cum expoliatur, inde auctoris audi

The detachment from the moral reflection is one trait that marks the evolution of the fable. In the *Physiologus*, the narrative and the moral considerations merge into one another.¹⁴ Here, we assuredly have a specific characteristic of the composition of Marie's fables.

Gotthold Lessing often emphasized the specific quality of the fable. The author does not attempt to move the reader by analyzing human passions. Instead, according to the principle of "reduction,"¹⁵ he leads the reader from a particular case to an abstract case, obliging him thereby to turn back on his own self and on his reading, in order to draw the appropriate lesson from the fable as a whole.

II. *Beneath the text: Biographical, historical, codicological context*¹⁶

Autobiographical elements

It is usually assumed that Marie de France was a Frenchwoman who lived in England. This idea is based on what the author herself affirms, namely, that she was "from France" (Epilogue, vv. 1–4):

Al finement de cest escrit
que en romanz ai treité et dit,
me numerai pur remembrance:
Marie ai nun, si sui de France.¹⁷

fabulam" [Lest anyone should become too proud at the expense of others' goods (for it is better to be content with the small quantity of goods that one possesses), lest he should be disgraced when he loses his goods, listen then to the author's fable]. See Sahar Amer, "L'Esope de Marie de France, *translatio* du *Romulus Nilantii*," in *The Medieval Translator*, ed. Roger Ellis and René Tixier (Traduire au Moyen Âge) 5 (Turnhout, 1996), pp. 347–61.

¹⁴ For example, in the Middle High German version of the fable of the Beaver, the narrative elements are combined with the moralizations, and *vice versa*. The presence of the devil (*tievil/tiuvellich*) is almost oppressive and is at any rate highly significant: *Der altdeutsche Physiologus*, ed. Friedrich Mauer (Tübingen, 1967), pp. 45–47. Even as late as the 13th-century German Stricker, the author finds it hard to detach the moral reflection from the body of the fable: see the fable *Der Kater als Freier* in *Der Stricker: Tierspiel*, ed. Ute Schwab, 2nd ed. (Tübingen, 1968), p. 47.

¹⁵ See Karl August Ott, "Lessing und La Fontaine: Von dem Gebrauch der Tiere in der Fabel," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 40 (1959), 235–66, at 237. See also Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's Introduction to his edition, where he explains the concept of "example" by means of the debate between Lessing and Kant: *Marie de France: Äsop* (Munich, 1973), pp. 32–33.

¹⁶ Here, we shall look exclusively at data supplied by the fables themselves.

¹⁷ All references to Marie's fables are from my edition, Charles Brucker, *Marie de France, Les Fables: Edition critique accompagnée d'une introduction, d'une traduction*,

[At the conclusion of this work, which I have written and narrated in French, I shall name myself for posterity: Marie is my name, and I am from France.]

In the same Epilogue, Marie declares that she has translated the *Fables* from an English version ascribed to King Alfred.¹⁸ This would prove that she knew English, an idea confirmed by the study of the *Lais*.¹⁹

Many critics have firmly believed that Marie was of royal birth. The attempt has been made to identify her with Marie de Champagne, the daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Louis VII, and wife of the Count of Champagne, Henri the Liberal. It is impossible to verify this or any other hypothesis.²⁰ It is the dedications of the *Lais* (to an unspecified king) and of the *Fables* (to a Count William) that are of decisive significance for the identification of Marie.²¹ The critics admit that the presentation of the king in the terms “a ki tute joie s'encline” [to whom all joy pays homage] (*Lais*, General Prologue, v. 45)²² concerns King Henry II Plantagenet. The Count William of the *Fables* (Epilogue, v. 9) has sometimes been identified with William Marshal (Guillaume le Maréchal), the first tutor of the Young King; Karl Warnke preferred to identify him with William Longsword (Guillaume Longue-Epée), the illegitimate son of Henry II.²³

de notes et d'un glossaire (Louvain, 1st ed. 1991; 2nd ed., 1998); I cite the 2nd edition [hereafter *Fables*]. The enumeration of the *Fables* is the same as in the edition by Harriet Spiegel, except that from No. 65 onwards, the enumeration in her edition is augmented by one unit, since she regards No. 65b (or 66) as a fable in its own right. English translations of Marie's fables are from Mary Lou Martin, trans., *The Fables of Marie de France* (Birmingham, AL, 1984). Unless otherwise noted, all further English translations throughout are by Brian McNeil.

¹⁸ See below. There is one piece of indirect evidence: the *Fables* and the *Lais* appear together in one manuscript, London, British Library, Harley 978, which may have been copied at Reading Abbey. This is also the oldest manuscript, possibly dating from the late 12th century.

¹⁹ See Philippe Ménard, *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1995), p. 28.

²⁰ See the Introduction to my edition of the *Fables*, p. 2.

²¹ See Ezio Levi, “Il Re Giovane e Marie di Francia,” *Archivum Romanicum* 5 (1921), 448–71. See also Carla Rossi, *Marie de France et les érudits de Cantorbéry* (Paris, 2009), and my review in *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 52 (2009), 439–441.

²² Unless otherwise noted, all references to the *Lais* are from Jean Rychner, ed., *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1978). All English translations of the *Lais* are from Keith Busby and Glyn S. Burgess, *The Lais of Marie de France* (London, 1st ed. 1986; 2nd ed., 1999).

²³ See my edition of the *Fables*, pp. 2–3.

Historical context

The historical data supplied by the *Fables*, however one interprets them, take the reader back to the second half of the 12th century, and essentially to the reign of Henry II. When counsels of moderation are addressed here and there to rulers and princes, this is the expression of a concern for peace and mutual respect in society. There was nothing idyllic about the reality of political and social life in the age of Stephen of Blois and Henry II. From the reign of Stephen of Blois (himself a usurper) onwards, social tensions of all kinds had emerged. In particular, the tensions between the king and the papacy had intensified, especially around 1148, when the trial of Gilbert de la Porrée took place.²⁴ Marie must have had personal experience of the entire period of conflicts between the Church and Henry II, which became ever more serious and culminated in the assassination of Thomas Becket.

Even more harmful for the Plantagenet empire itself was the fact that the internal disorder was due to a corruption that had permeated all the social strata of the administration of Henry II. John of Salisbury was certainly the closest witness and the most severe critic of all the abuses in the field of justice and among the members of the higher clergy and the nobility, which he castigates in Chapter 16 of his *Policraticus*,²⁵ employing images that reveal the extent of their voracity and perversity, worthy of some of the animal characters in Marie's fables. If cupidity and voracity,²⁶ and cunning and falsehood,²⁷ are so often represented in her writings,²⁸ it is because Marie saw the authors of all these vices at their work. This explains why one important aspect of the *Fables* is similar to that of the mirrors of princes.

²⁴ See Charles Brucker and Denis Foulechat, *Le Policratique de Jean de Salisbury: Livre V* (Geneva, 1994), p. 27. See also Marvin L. Colker, "The Trial of Gilbert of Poitiers: A Previously Unknown Record," *Medieval Studies* 27 (1965), 152–83.

²⁵ Brucker and Foulechat, *Policratique*, pp. 88ff.

²⁶ For example, Fable 4 ("The dog and the lamb"), esp. vv. 30–42.

²⁷ For example, Fable 34 ("The king of the monkeys"), especially the moral reflection (vv. 56–60).

²⁸ See my "Mirror of Princes." This is because Marie seeks to establish analogies between the world of the animals and the world of human beings.

*Manuscripts and editions*²⁹

The manuscript tradition was first edited³⁰ with care in 1898 by Karl Warnke³¹ in the lengthy Introduction to his edition of the *Fables*.³² All the modern editions are indebted to the immense labors and knowledge of this philologist, and all the editors have followed him in taking London, British Library, Harley 978 (MS A)³³ as the base manuscript. With MS D, this is the oldest manuscript. It is complete and contains only a few copyist's errors. The adjustments and procedures vary slightly from one edition to another.

As was the custom even at the close of the 19th century, Warnke sought to re-establish the "original" text by means of numerous corrections to the base manuscript. His starting point is the principle that Marie wrote a kind of common literary language based on the Francian dialect of the Île-de-France, but sprinkled with Anglo-Norman elements, and this guided him in his attempt to reconstitute Marie's language by correcting the Anglo-Norman marks and replacing them with the corresponding Francian terms which he found in other

²⁹ Here, we limit ourselves to a presentation of the editions of the *Fables* and their relationship to the manuscript tradition.

³⁰ We should, however, not neglect the two-volume edition of the *Lais* and the *Fables* by Jean-Baptiste-Bonaventure de Roquefort-Flaméricourt (Paris, 1820), which met with critical acclaim when it was published. The *Fables* are in the second volume.

³¹ Karl Warnke, *Die Fabeln der Marie de France*, (Bibliotheca Normannica) 6 (Halle, 1898; rpr. Geneva, 1974). Warnke notes that he has made use of the documentation which Eduard Mall left behind at his death.

³² Pp. xx-xxi and xliii. The classification is based on the examination of all the manuscripts. The question is taken up anew by Richard Trachsler, "Les Fables de Marie de France: Manuscrits et éditions," *Cahiers de Civilisation médiévale* 44 (2001), 45-63. He attempts to rethink the whole problem of classification. He draws attention to the order of the fables and to the absence or presence of one or other fable in the various manuscripts. These reflections allow him to define more precisely the problems involved in an edition of the *Fables*.

³³ See Warnke, p. xliii; Spiegel, "The Woman's Voice," p. 13; Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 19ff.; Mary Lou Martin, *The Fables of Marie de France: A Critical Commentary with English Translation* (Diss., University of Texas, 1979, DAI 40:7, 1980), pp. 45ff.; Karen K. Jambeck, *Les Fables de Marie de France. Édition critique de fables choisies* (Diss., University of Connecticut-Storrs, 1980, DAI 41:8, 1981), pp. lxxxixff.; but also, in a new critical perspective, Trachsler, "Les Fables de Marie de France: Manuscrits et éditions," pp. 58ff. Warnke's introduction includes the examination of the various versions of the *Romulus*. The work closes with a list of the sources and an inventory of the places (folios) where each fable can be found in each manuscript.

manuscripts, e.g. MS N,³⁴ a “continental” manuscript. Thus, in Fable 73, v. 52 *requere* (subj. pr. 3) becomes *requiere*. Retouchings of this kind suppress or denature the Anglo-Norman traits of MS A, which constitute a relatively coherent ensemble.

In the mid-20th century, as had already happened in the case of other texts, the editors of the *Fables* of Marie de France felt the need to get hold either of the text of the base manuscript or at least of a text as close to that text as possible. In their 1942 edition, which covers only 46 fables, Alfred Ewert and Ronald C. Johnston³⁵ deliberately abandoned the idea of attempting to reconstruct the “original,” and did their utmost to present the text as it could have appeared to the contemporaries of the scribe of A.³⁶ They carefully enumerate the instances where they do not respect the text of the base manuscript; nevertheless, if the reader does not constantly bear in mind the relevant pages of the introduction, it is impossible to be aware of the editorial corrections or of the elimination of characteristic traits of the hand of the Anglo-Norman scribe.³⁷

We find the same tendency in Karen K. Jambeck’s partial edition (of ten fables) in 1980.³⁸ She has written elsewhere³⁹ about her conception of the edition of the *Fables*. Unlike the earlier edition, hers does not attempt to re-establish the octosyllable, but indicates or suggests the way in which the octosyllable might be re-established. Her textual approach is original: the critical apparatus is complete,⁴⁰ because she takes account of the readings of all the manuscripts, so that the reader has an exact overview of the manuscript evidence—which is not always the case with Warnke’s apparatus.

³⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 1593.

³⁵ Alfred Ewert and Ronald C. Johnston, *Marie de France, Fables, selected and edited* (Oxford, 1942).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. xiv.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

³⁸ Jambeck, *Les Fables de Marie de France. Édition critique*.

³⁹ Karen K. Jambeck, “The Fables of Marie de France: Base Text and Critical Text,” *Text* 2 (1985), 83–91. On the question of how to establish the text of the fables, see also Gabrielle Parussa, “De l’ancien au moyen français, ou comment transcrire les ‘Fables’ de Marie de France au XVe siècle,” *Travaux de Linguistique et de Philologie* 38 (2000), 27–50. Interestingly, Parussa pays particular attention to the examination of MS I (15th century), where the scribe elaborates an orthographic system all of his own (p. 40).

⁴⁰ We should add that her comprehensive presentation includes, in addition to the *Fables*, a detailed description of the entire contents of each manuscript.

Two editions were published in 1987. In addition to relevant textual notes, the edition by Harriet Spiegel⁴¹ presents at the end of the book a concordance of all the manuscripts, so that it is easy to see in which manuscripts any given fable is present, and where it is missing. She respects as far as possible the text of MS A; a list of corrections follows a summary bibliography, but some of these corrections are far from convincing.⁴² Yorio Otaka's edition follows the text of A even more closely;⁴³ the editor does not give consideration to any variant reading.

In 1991, an edition of a somewhat different character was published,⁴⁴ although this too takes MS A as the base manuscript. The octosyllables are retained, but in such a way that at any given moment the reader has access to the text as it is found in MS A without retouchings,⁴⁵ and at the same time to a text which is slightly adjusted in order to obtain a "regular" versification. In short, this is a double reading: the characters in italics indicate that, for the sake of the versification, the reader should suppress them in his or her mind, while the characters in brackets invite the reader to add them in his or her mind. Finally, by way of comparison, the editor has added on the second level in the apparatus criticus the non-graphic variants of N, the complete and continental manuscript.

The study and translation by Mary Lou Martin,⁴⁶ which is first and foremost a commentary on the *Fables*, reproduces Warnke's text on one page, flanked by her English translation on the other. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's book⁴⁷ has a very valuable introduction which presents the *Fables* in a new light. It flanks Warnke's text with a German translation.

⁴¹ Harriett Spiegel, *Marie de France: Fables edited and translated* (Toronto, 1987). This edition is accompanied by a translation into English verse.

⁴² For example, in Fable 16, v. 34 *saudrez* can perfectly well be retained, despite Warnke's correction.

⁴³ Yorio Otaka, *Marie de France: Œuvre complète* (Tokyo, 1987).

⁴⁴ Brucker, *Fables*.

⁴⁵ Apart from those corrections which are clearly marked by an asterisk, where the form retained from another manuscript is printed in italics in the critical apparatus at the foot of the page.

⁴⁶ Martin, *The Fables of Marie de France* (Diss.). Revised and reprinted as her translation (see note 17 above).

⁴⁷ See note 15 above. We may add here the partial translations by Norman R. Shapiro, *Fables from Old French: Aesop's Beasts and Bumpkins* (Middletown, CT, 1982), 11 fables of Marie de France from Warnke with English translations, and a

III. Marie's fable in the tradition of the Aesopic fable

Marie's awareness of the characteristics of the genre of the Aesopic fable

This Greco-Latin tradition is clearly evoked by Marie in the Prologue to her *Fables*. It is not irrelevant to note that she begins by giving pedagogical advice, and only then moralizing advice. She reminds the *clercs* ("clerical community") that culture demands effort,⁴⁸ and she does not fail to mention the genres that are obviously most involved in the Aesopic fable, namely, the *exempla* (*exemples*) and the maxims (*diz*). At the same time, however,⁴⁹ the moral perspective and moralization are present at every moment in this "preface," where Marie sounds the following note: "par moralité escriveient / les bons pruverbes qu'il oieient" [It was in order to give a lesson in morality that they wrote the precious proverbs which they heard] (vv. 7–8). This general intention of the *philosophe*⁵⁰ is immediately made explicit by the reader's perspective, which Marie takes into account. A relationship is indirectly established between the reading of the *bons pruverbes* and the moral result, "doing good": "que cil amender se peüssent / ki lur enente en bien eüssent" [so that those who would apply themselves to do good might thereby become better] (vv. 9–10).

The remarkable element in this Prologue is the introduction of the theme of the "ancestors," which must be understood in the widest sense, but refers primarily to Greco-Latin antiquity. Marie passes from *des anciens peres* to the emblematic figure of Romulus,⁵¹ the supposed

selection from the *Isopet I*, *Isopet de Paris*, and *Isopet de Chartres*; Jeannette Beer, *Medieval Fables* (New York, 1983); Jeanne-Marie Boivin and Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Fables françaises du Moyen Âge* (Edition bilingue) (Paris, 1996), 12 fables of Marie de France from Warnke, and a selection from the *Isopet de Lyon*, *Isopet de Chartres*, *Isopet II de Paris*, *Isopet I*, *Avionnet*, and *Esope de Julien Macho*.

⁴⁸ "Devreient bien mettre lur cure..." (Prologue, v. 2). This idea of effort is also found in the Prologue to the *Lais*: "Estudier deit e entendre / A grevose ovre comencier" (vv. 24–25).

⁴⁹ This shows how strongly these didactic genres are linked to moralization.

⁵⁰ In the modern sense of "wise persons."

⁵¹ This would necessarily evoke in the mind of Marie herself, or in her readers, the *Romulus* and its versions, to which we shall return.

emperor who was said to have written a letter of recommendation⁵²—a mirror of princes *avant la lettre*—to his son.⁵³ Furthermore, the first counsel the father gives his son concerns one of the fundamental elements in the mirror of princes by John of Salisbury, namely, the flattery which courtiers lavish on their prince in order to deceive him: “... cum il se deust cuntregaiter / que hum nel peüst enginner” [how he must be on his guard against the deceit of human beings] (vv. 15–16). Then, inevitably—and still in the spirit of the mirrors of princes—the figure of Aesop appears.⁵⁴ He roots the fable even more deeply in a classical tradition: “Esopes escrist a son mestre / que bien conust lui e sun estre, / une fables ke ot trouvees, / de griu en latin translates” [Aesop, who well knew his master and his way of thinking, wrote for him a collection of fables which he had composed and translated from Greek into Latin] (vv. 17–20).

This is indubitably a moral reflection, but we may not infer from this that Marie lacks sensitivity, a rhetorical strategy, or humor. The classical material does not in the least hamper Marie in her construction of the fable and in the expression of her own feelings, even if she does not necessarily put these to the forefront when she writes.

Supposed classical sources

How did the classical material,⁵⁵ in the context of the fable, reach Marie de France? When she composed her own fables, how did she perceive the existence of a collective memory that no 12th-century author could ignore? Strangely enough, if we are to believe what she herself affirms in the Epilogue,⁵⁶ this collective memory is approached by Marie by way of a version written in English, or more exactly (given the historical period) in Old English or Anglo-Saxon:

⁵² This letter, written by an alleged emperor, is meant to authenticate not only the ultimate source of fables in general but also Marie's fables themselves. See Edward Wheatley, *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer and his Followers* (Gainesville, FL, 2001), pp. 64–65. This letter is mentioned in the Prologue to the *Romulus*.

⁵³ Marie cannot have been unacquainted with the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury. Book V of this work is constructed on the basis of Pseudo-Plutarch, a fictitious letter addressed by Plutarch to his pupil, the emperor Trajan.

⁵⁴ Although this is a fictitious Aesop, who represents the Aesopic tradition as a whole.

⁵⁵ If one wishes to appreciate the fable of Marie de France at its true value, it is absolutely necessary to take into account the classical sources of the medieval fable.

⁵⁶ Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 364–67.

Par amur le cunte Willame
 le plus vaillant de nul realme,
 m'entremis de cest livre feire
 e de l'engleis en romanz treire. (vv. 9–12)

[For the love of Count William, the most valiant of this realm, I undertook to write and to translate it from English into French]

The Epilogue then specifies the provenance of the alleged English version. Its original goes back to Aesop,⁵⁷ who is said to have translated the collection from Greek into Latin:

Esopë appel'um cest livre,
 qu'il translata et fist escrire,
 del griu en latin le turna. (vv. 13–15)

[This book is called *Ysopet*, after the one who translated it from Greek into Latin]

Aesop is both the name of the author and the title of the “book.” This shows that Marie regards “Aesop” as in some sense the generic term for the fable, considered in the context of its history. Accordingly, when she wishes to evoke a text, and especially the text that served as the model for her translation, she cites a precise source—or at least, a source that she considers precise:

Li reis alvrez, que mut l'ama
 le translata puis en engleis,
 e jeo l'ai rimee en franceis,
 si cum jeo poi plus proprement. (vv. 16–18)

[King Alfred, who esteemed it highly, then translated it into English, and I have rendered it, exactly as I found it, into French verse]

Marie locates herself at the end of this chain of transmission. For the modern reader, however, the picture is far from clear.

Medieval sources according to Marie

To begin with, “Alfred” cannot be identified with King Alfred, who reigned from 871 to 901. In the course of scholarly polemics about this name, it has been suggested that Marie must have made use of a text

⁵⁷ In Marie's mind, the person of Aesop literally frames her collection: he is cited both in the Prologue and in the Epilogue. This shows that she is fully aware of the way in which the fable is rooted in a Greco-Latin tradition; at the same time, however, she is surely unaware of the full breadth of this tradition.

in Middle English rather than in Old English. Eduard Mall proposes the following solution: “Alfred,” the compiler of the Latin collection, would be Alfredus Anglicus, the 12th-century translator.⁵⁸ He did not know Arabic, but he could have worked alongside a Jewish interpreter who would have helped him with the translation into Latin.⁵⁹ The grammarian whom Jacobs associates with Alfredus Anglicus is Berechiah, the author of a collection of fables in Hebrew,⁶⁰ who in turn was inspired by popular oriental tales. According to Joseph Jacobs,⁶¹ Berechiah and Marie ultimately both work on the same source, Alfredus’ Latin *Aesop*. Berechiah not only helped Alfredus in his translation but also worked independently on Alfredus’ collection.⁶² This means that the versions of Marie and Berechiah⁶³ would be parallel versions deriving from one and the same source.⁶⁴ Warnke refuted Jacobs’ position, arguing that English terms such as *welke* (Fable 12, v. 2) or *witecoc* (Fable 52, v. 20) prove that Marie made use of an English text—but a Middle English text rather than Old English.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Eduard Mall, “Zur Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Fabelliteratur und insbesondere des *Esopus* der Marie de France,” *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 9 (1885), 161–203.

⁵⁹ In this way, Marie would have had access to fables of an oriental provenance. This would explain the presence of an oriental influence, in the broad sense of the term, in the second part of her collection.

⁶⁰ See Haim Schwarzbaum, *The Mishle Shu’alim (Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiah Na-Nakdan. A Study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore* (Tel Aviv, 1979).

⁶¹ *The Fables of Aesop as first printed by W. Caxton in 1484 with those of Avian, Alfonso and Poggio*, ed. Joseph Jacobs, 2 vols (London, 1889), 1:165.

⁶² It is not impossible that Berechiah was influenced to some extent by Marie’s collection. In Fable 19 (“Two Deer”), deer are involved, and some manuscripts, e.g. *N* (see my edition), erroneously read *cer(f)s* instead of *serfs* (which is the correct reading: see Marie, Fable 41, “The rich man and the serfs”); this proves that Berechiah knew Marie’s collection. We should add that the two nouns were not pronounced in exactly the same way in the 12th century, which in principle means that there ought not to be an equivalence in the way they were written.

⁶³ While the *Fables* of Avianus seem not to have influenced Marie directly or indirectly, Berechiah’s collection shows traces of direct influence from Avianus (see Schwarzbaum, *The Mishle Shu’alim*, pp. 241–44, and p. 245, n. 14).

⁶⁴ Sahar Amer goes much further than this in her book *Esope au féminin: Marie de France et la politique de l’interculturalité* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1999). She convincingly demonstrates the dimension of Arabic influence on the fable of Marie de France, especially through a comparative study of the collection of Arabic fables, *Kalilah wa Dimnah*. She also shows (p. 69) how Marie rejects the authority of the Latin tradition and how, thanks to the Arabic influence, it is now the pleasure of narrating (p. 70) that will guide Marie in the composition of her fables.

⁶⁵ This would exclude *ipso facto* the authorship of King Alfred. See the introduction to my edition, pp. 7–8.

Verifiable ancient sources

In these circumstances, how is the fable of Marie de France connected to an ancient tradition? The fable, as a brief genre and a naïve aspect of allegory,⁶⁶ is related to myth. It is thus unsurprising that the inventor of the fable is located in a period in Greek literature where it was still difficult to distinguish history from myth. Nor is it surprising that it is Herodotus,⁶⁷ who relates the anecdote that is thought to represent the action by which Aesop founded the genre.⁶⁸ Herodotus⁶⁹ likes to have recourse to fables⁷⁰ in order to illustrate certain kinds of political behavior.⁷¹ At an early date, therefore, thanks to its didactic aspect,⁷²

⁶⁶ In Marie, *fable* has the meaning of a “brief moralizing narrative” (Prologue, v. 19). There may be an overlapping of meaning between the Latin *fabula* and its diminutive *fabella*.

⁶⁷ Hérodote, *Histoires*, livres 1–9, ed. Philippe-Ernest Legrand, 11 vols (Paris, 1932–54), Book II, ch. 134 § 3. Aesop is said to have been a slave who was later set free. According to the *Life of Aesop*, the author of the fables was killed by the men of Delphi. When he was been accused of stealing a gold cup from the temple of Apollo, he related the story of the eagle and the beetle, in order to persuade them to spare his life. Despite this, he was unjustly put to death. In both texts, Aesop is recognized as the author of fables.

⁶⁸ This legendary narrative prompted the *Life of Aesop*, which was translated from Latin to French by Julien Macho: *Recueil général des Isopets*, ed. Pierre Ruelle, 3 vols (Paris, 1982), vol. 3, § 715, p. 75. It was translated from Greek to Latin in the 14th century.

⁶⁹ After Herodotus, especially in Aristophanes, the fable takes the form of the fable-narrative, at least in the framework of an illusion. See his *Paix*, ed., Victor Coulon, 5 vols (Paris, 1923–30), 2:127–30: “It is in the fables of Aesop that I have discovered that alone of all flying things, it [i.e. the beetle] has reached the gods.” This allusion obviously presupposes the existence of a fable-narrative.

⁷⁰ It is interesting that the term used by Herodotus is *logos*. And in Book II, ch. 134, Aesop is designated by the term *logopoios*.

⁷¹ In Book I, ch. 141, Cyrus tells the Ionians and Aeolians, who have delayed in surrendering to him, the fable of the flute player and the fish, in order to make them realize that he will not pay any heed to their promise to be good subjects. And the Ionians and the Aeolians get the message: they hasten to fortify their cities and to ask the Spartans for help.

⁷² It is here that we see how close is the relationship between the fable and the *exemplum*. The argumentative character of the *exemplum*-fable can be seen clearly in Livy, *Histoire romaine*, ed. Jean Bayet (Paris, 1962), Book II, ch. 32, §§ 8–12: Menenius Agrippa employs the fable of “The stomach and the limbs” in order to convince the plebeians to return to the city; see Gumbrecht, *Marie de France*, pp. 20ff. This apologia is taken up again by John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, Book V, 2, and by Marie de France, Fable 27. See my edition of (Book V of the) *Policratique*, Denis Foulechat, *Le “Policratique” de Jean de Salisbury*, Livre V, ed. Charles Brucker (Geneva, 2006), pp. 44 and 71; see the treatise *De membris conspirantibus*, wrongly attributed to John of Salisbury (it is found in the 1513 edition of the *Policraticus*).

the fable plays the role of a mirror of society, or at least of some forms of societal behavior.

In the earliest periods of Greek literature, the Aesopic fable *avant la lettre*, even in the simplest form of the fable-*exemplum* based on the employment of animals and of an animal context, displays an independent character, in the sense that it already constitutes a genre. For example, we already find in Hesiod the parable "The Hawk and the Nightingale,"⁷³ which runs through the entire tradition of the genre and is found in Aesop, in the *Romulus*, and in the collection of Marie de France.⁷⁴ The idea of assembling an anthology or collection of the fables, or of a selection, arose at a very early date. This applied especially to those with a significant political or social meaning. Demetrius of Phaleron, an orator and statesman in the 4th century B.C., was the first to publish a collection, a kind of anthology, which may still have existed in the 10th century A.D. but has since been lost.

The compiler attributes the fables to Aesop. The compilation of Demetrius and the *Augustana*, the oldest collection of Greek prose fables still existing,⁷⁵ may have been the source of the 123 Greek fables from the second half of the 1st century A.D. which are attributed to Babrius, who was the first—as he himself asserts⁷⁶—to turn the fables of Aesop (or the alleged fables of Aesop) into verse. He had many Latin imitators, including Avianus in the 4th century. The collection of fables by Phaedrus⁷⁷ also derives from this compilation, and they were to have at least an indirect relationship to Marie's fables.

⁷³ See François Lasserre, "La Fable en Grèce archaïque," in *La Fable*, ed. Francisco R. Adrados (Entretiens) 30 (Geneva, 1984), pp. 60ff.; Hésiode, *Les Travaux et les jours*, ed. Paul Mazon (Paris, 1944), vv. 202–12.

⁷⁴ Brucker, *Fables*, no. 66, pp. 254–55; freedom of expression is unthinkable in an environment where fear and suspicion reign. In the introductory poem to the *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury demonstrates this by an extremely poignant and convincing *mise en scène*.

⁷⁵ See Francisco R. Adrados, "Les Collections de Fables à l'époque hellénistique et romaine," in *La Fable*, ed. Francisco R. Adrados et alii, Fondation Hardt (Geneva, 1964), pp. 139–44.

⁷⁶ *Babrius and Phaedrus*, ed. Ben E. Perry (London, 1965), p. 4. Babrius writes that he will adorn each fable with the flowers of his own poetic talents. He will sweeten the hard chords of the iambs and present the reader with a honeycomb dripping with sweetness.

⁷⁷ A freedman of Augustus who was doubtless still alive under Nero.

The fables of Babrius

The fables of Babrius play a more important role than one might be inclined to think in the chain of the transmissions of the various versions of the Aesopic fable, even if they are not located directly in the same line of tradition as Marie de France. With Phaedrus, Babrius represents the link that connects the Aesopic fable to Demetrius. To varying degrees, Phaedrus and Babrius are inspired by the compilation of Demetrius. This means that the fables of Phaedrus—and consequently those of the *Romulus* (and hence those of Marie de France too)—display a number of traits that we find in the work of Babrius. First, we are surprised by the brevity of the fable.⁷⁸ It is always reduced to a tale or story about animals that are endowed with a traditional character: for example, the wolf has the role of the one who puts forward perceptive arguments. Even in comparison to the fable of Phaedrus, the fable of Babrius is characterized by the lack of a moral reflection and by the abundance of dialogues. The liveliness of these dialogues sometimes gives the fable of Babrius a novelistic style. In other words, the fable of Babrius, which will be imitated by Avianus, remains very close to the bestiary in the strict sense, which we find in Hesiod.⁷⁹ He tells a story about the sparrow hawk and the nightingale, but unlike Babrius, Hesiod adds a conclusion that comes close to a moral reflection. Such reflections are usually absent from Babrius' fables, where the animal story is enough on its own. For example, in the fable "The Fox and the Wine Grapes," it is the fox himself who draws the consequences that his unfortunate experience has for him, but he falsifies the nature of this experience: he was trying to get hold of grapes that were too high for him to reach, and all he does is to lull his unease by saying, "I imagine that the grapes were sour, not ripe."⁸⁰ Sometimes, the conclusion can be guessed by means of the threat posed by one animal, who tells another animal that he will settle accounts with him later on (outside the fable), but there is no doubt about the dénouement of the conflict. One example is Fable 91 ("Patience while waiting"), where the

⁷⁸ This will no longer be the case in the *Isopets*.

⁷⁹ *Les Travaux et les jours*, vv. 202–12. The conclusion is presented in the form of a maxim. For example, in v. 208, the principal clause lacks a verb, and the subjunctive (indicating possibility and generality) is employed in the relative subordinate clause (with *ke*).

⁸⁰ Perry, *Phaedrus*, Fable 19, p. 31.

bull has the last word.⁸¹ What it says allows the reader to predict the outcome of the confrontation and at the same time the lesson that is implicit in the narrative of the fable. There are many cases where the moral reflection, though implicit, is nevertheless unequivocal.

A bestiary in the strict sense: The Physiologus

Another instance of indirect influence on Marie's fables deserves a closer look, namely, the *Physiologus*,⁸² which has been systematically excluded from the debate about the medieval fable, and hence about the fable of Marie de France. Although she did not have direct contact with any of the versions⁸³ of the *Physiologus*,⁸⁴ it is difficult to believe that this genre of bestiary, which enjoyed an immense success, could have been completely unknown to Marie. When the critics do mention the *Physiologus*, they seldom emphasize the strong allegorization in this bestiary,⁸⁵ beginning with the Latin text. For example, in No. 1 of Friedrich Maurer's edition, which concerns the lion, an equivalence between the lion and Christ is established at every instant, either explicitly or by implication.⁸⁶ The contrast between persons of good will and the wicked is almost omnipresent in the *Physiologus*. In one and the same animal, the good qualities can be juxtaposed to the vices. Thus, the viper (*De vipera*), thanks to its very nature, has both a repulsive and a positive aspect. The negative side consists in the fact that it devours the genitals of the male;⁸⁷ accordingly, the vipers are

⁸¹ Ibid. The bull tells the billy goat that has just attacked it: "Make way for the lion; then you will know the difference between a nanny goat and a bull" (v. 113).

⁸² See the selection of bestiaries translated by Gabriel Bianciotto, *Bestiaires du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1980).

⁸³ See Nikolaus Henkel, *Studien zum Physiologus im Mittelalter* (Tübingen, 1976), pp. 21ff.

⁸⁴ In part, it goes back to Greco-Latin antiquity; its most ancient form may go back to the 3rd century A.D. (see Henkel, *Studien*, p. 15). But the influence of Isidore of Seville can be seen very clearly at many points in this compilation.

⁸⁵ On the medieval conception of the allegorical reading of nature, see Baudoin van den Abeele, "L'allégorie animal dans les encyclopédies latines du Moyen Âge," in *L'Animal exemplaire au Moyen Âge: V^e-XV^e siècles*, ed. Jacques Berlioz and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Rennes, 1999), pp. 123-43.

⁸⁶ See *Der altdeutsche Physiologus*, ed. Friedrich Maurer (Tübingen, 1967). One single passage suffices to demonstrate this: "Cum dormierit leo, vigilant oculi eius in aperiendo, sicut et in cantico canticorum testator sponsus de se ipso: Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat" [When the lion sleeps, its eyes are open and keep watch, just as the bridegroom in the Song of Songs testifies: "I sleep, and my heart is awake"] (p. 75).

⁸⁷ "...degluciens semen abscidit virilia ejusdem maculi et moritur statim" (ibid., p. 81).

compared to the Pharisees who killed their father, i.e. Christ.⁸⁸ The positive side is represented by their habit of sloughing off the old skin, which symbolizes impurity, and acquiring a new body.⁸⁹ The author of the *Physiologus* immediately adds: “Angusta est porta et arta via, que ducit ad vitam” [The door is narrow, the way difficult, that leads to life]. “Life” here refers to the spiritual strength⁹⁰ that can lead the human person to the salvation of his soul.

The mechanism of allegory underlies many of Marie’s fables,⁹¹ although she never gets involved in spiritual matters in the strict sense. Although it is true that, unlike the *Physiologus*, she never invokes the authority of the David of the Psalms or of the prophet Isaiah—as the *Physiologus* does in the case of the pelican⁹²—it is nevertheless true that implicitly, just as in most of the components of the *Physiologus*, it is the conflict between good and evil that Marie presents to us through the symbolic actions of the animals.⁹³ Marie certainly appreciates moderation, as she often shows in her *Lais*, and this is why we never encounter in any of her fables the metaphysical or spiritual confrontation between the good and the wicked. But exactly like the *Physiologus*, she too delights in contrasting various types of human beings: the cunning and the innocent (as in Fable 61), good people and dishonest people (as in Fable 78), and gluttons and moderate eaters

⁸⁸ “Viperi comparati sunt Pharisei..., occiderunt parentem Christum...” (ibid., p. 81).

⁸⁹ “...querit excisium petre et per ipsum transitum facit sicque expoliatur et juvenescit” (ibid., p. 82).

⁹⁰ The mystical aspect of the *Physiologus* is still found in its first French version. See *Le Bestiaire de Philippe de Thäün*, ed. Emmanuel Walberg (Lund and Paris, 1900), with regard to the *monosceros* (vv. 437–56, p. 17).

⁹¹ For example, in Fable 61 (Brucker, *Fables*, p. 240), when the dove and the fox confront each other verbally, it cannot be denied that this involves a very real kind of allegory, that of the opposition between hypocrisy and innocence, all the more so since the moral reflection of this fable is illuminating from this point of view: “Si vet des feluns veiziez: / par eus sunt plusurs enginnez / par parole, par faus sermun, / cum li gupilz fist le colum” [So it goes with sly scoundrels: many people are tricked by their speech and their false oaths, just as the fox wanted to trick the dove] (vv. 33–36).

⁹² Latin version, Maurer, *Physiologus*, p. 87. The French bestiary does not provide spiritual and religious interpretations before the beginning of the 13th century. In France, Pierre de Beauvais was the first to imitate the *Physiologus* in this way: see *On the pelican* (*Physiologus*, pp. 57–58), where two-thirds of the “fable” are dedicated to the comparison between Christ and a liturgical element, namely, baptism. See Bianciotto, *Bestiaires du Moyen Âge*, p. 28 (on Pierre de Beauvais); see also *Le Bestiaire de Pierre de Beauvais (version courte)*, ed. Guy R. Mermier, (Paris, 1977), pp. 39–40.

⁹³ On the bestiaries, see Armand Strubel, “Grant senefience a”: *allégorie et littérature au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2002), pp. 110–11.

(as in Fable 50). These contrasts appear explicitly in the moral reflection, but they are usually prepared carefully in the course of the narrative, e.g. in Fable 79 ("The Hawk and the Owl"). The structure of the fable is based on a contradictory argument which is meticulously conducted and elaborated in order to create an effect of surprise. This surprise is meant to generate a moral reflection that the reader was not expecting. A kind of *promythium* posits the existence of a life and a world that are absolutely paradisiacal, thanks to the concord and the friendship between the two families, that of the hawk and that of the owl: "the two loved one another so much / that they brooded on their eggs in one and the same nest / and brought up their chicks together" (vv. 4–6). Despite this highly optimistic declaration, however, Marie's moral reflection comes to the following conclusion: "The human being can make his nature suffer a deviation / but no one can escape from nature altogether" (vv. 39–40). In short, the two sets of offspring in this fable have in fact their own specific characters, and perfect accord and harmony remain an illusion. No further words are needed. Marie knows her public, namely, the lords and princes who want to enlarge their territories through the fusion of peoples of diverse origins, and who end up by kicking themselves.

IV. *Fables derived from Phaedrus, both before and after Marie de France*

Collections that existed before Marie

The anthology of Latin fables ascribed to Phaedrus derives from the compilation by Demetrius of Phaleron. Phaedrus' anthology played an important role in the creation of another, extremely important compilation, namely, the *Romulus*.⁹⁴ Unlike Babrius, the collection by Phaedrus involves a moral reflection, with almost systematic regularity; such a reflection is found in a more reduced manner in Aesop,⁹⁵

⁹⁴ In her recent book *Naissance de la fable en français: L'Isopet de Lyon et l'Isopet I-Avionnet* (Paris, 2006), Jeanne-Marie Boivin has brought out with admirable clarity the importance and the originality of the *Romulus* in the context of the Aesopic tradition. In particular, she insists on the fact that the *Romulus* is a "body of essentially animal fables" (p. 95). In the *Romulus ordinarius*, 91 per cent of the fables involve animals (p. 96).

⁹⁵ In general, it is limited to one single sentence, which is almost always impersonal in tone and has affinities to the maxim.

i.e. in the Greek fables attributed to Aesop. The tradition of Phaedrus' fables brought adaptations in prose and verse. We can distinguish three groups: (1) the *Aesop* in prose by Ademar of Chabannes,⁹⁶ in the 10th century; (2) the *Aesop* of Rufus,⁹⁷ also known as the collection of Wissembourg, written in prose at the beginning of the 10th century; and (3) the *Romulus*,⁹⁸ a 4th-century work which is of particular interest because of the numerous texts which derive from it, both in prose and in verse, which underlie many traditions of fables in vernacular languages.⁹⁹ According to a tradition to which scholars give little credence, this *Romulus* (which in fact derives from Phaedrus) would be a Latin translation of Greek fables.

There are three versions of the *Romulus* in prose: (1) the *Romulus ordinarius* (*Romulus vulgaris*);¹⁰⁰ (2) the *Romulus of Vienna and Berlin*;¹⁰¹ and (3) the *Romulus Nilantii*.¹⁰² The success of this genre of compilation can be gauged from the number of its adaptations, which are often nothing other than abbreviations. There are three of these: (1) the *Romulus* of Vincent of Beauvais;¹⁰³ (2) the *Romulus of Oxford*;¹⁰⁴ and (3) the *Romulus of Berne*.¹⁰⁵

The verse adaptations include the *Romulus of Nevelet*,¹⁰⁶ an anonymous 12th-century compilation published by Nevelet in 1610 and attributed to Walter the Englishman (*Gualterus Anglicus*), and the 13th-century *Novus Aesopus* of Alexander Neckham.¹⁰⁷ These versions in verse are the source of the French compilations made after the 12th

⁹⁶ See Klaus Grubmüller, *Meister Esopus: Untersuchungen zu Geschichte und Funktion der Fabel im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1987), p. 64.

⁹⁷ Hervieux, 1:267ff.

⁹⁸ It is not known whether this is the name of an emperor or the name of a compiler. In a first epistle, we read "Romulus Tiberino filio," which gives the compilation the appearance of a mirror of princes in the Prologue of Marie de France; in another epistle, only Aesop is mentioned ("magistro Rufo Aesopus salutem"). Subsequently, in the 12th century, a confusion arose in connection with the last emperor of Rome, Romulus Augustulus; it is assuredly in this direction (originating more or less in a mystification) that we should see the *Romulus* evoked by Marie in her Prologue.

⁹⁹ In addition to Marie's fables, we may mention the 13th-century fables of Stricker in Middle High German (see Grubmüller, *Meister Esopus*, pp. 155ff.).

¹⁰⁰ Hervieux, 2:195–261.

¹⁰¹ So called from the provenance of the manuscripts: Hervieux, 2:417–34.

¹⁰² Hervieux, 2:513–48 (so called because it was published by J.F. Nilant in 1709).

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 234–45 (13th century).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 246–61.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 758–62.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 316–51.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 392–416.

century: the *Ysopet de Lyon*,¹⁰⁸ the *Isopet de Chartres*, and the *Isopet de Paris*.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion: Direct sources of the fable of Marie de France

When we take into account the direct sources of the fables of Marie de France, it is possible to regard her *Fables* as divided into three parts. The first 40 fables derive from the *Romulus Nilantii*. Of the 62 others, most go back ultimately to classical antiquity; a minority has popular and folkloristic origins.

The compiler Alfredus (see above) may have been inspired by the *Romulus Nilantii*, and the same may be true of Marie. It seems that we cannot consider the *Anglo-Latin Romulus*¹¹⁰ as the source either of Alfredus or of Marie de France.¹¹¹ Runte agrees with this position and has presented a convincing demonstration. He argues that it is impossible to understand a text like Fable 25 of Marie ("The Wife Who Had Her Husband Hanged")¹¹² without reading the *Romulus Nilantii* and investigating the sources of the latter text—which are in fact found essentially in the *Satiricon* of Petronius. However, the direct source seems to have been a passage in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury (Book VIII, vol. 2, p. 301),¹¹³ which appears to be based on the anecdote of the Matron of Ephesus which Petronius relates in his *Satiricon* (§ 111).¹¹⁴ Although this does not in any way diminish the force of the

¹⁰⁸ *Lyoner Yzopet*, ed. Wendelin Foerster (Wiesbaden, 1882).

¹⁰⁹ *Recueil général des Isopets*, ed. Julia Bastin, 2 vols (Paris, 1929–30), *Isopet de Chartres*, 1:133ff, *Isopet de Paris*, 1:29ff.

¹¹⁰ Hervieux, 1:734ff. See, however, the recent study by Michael Lapidge and Jill Mann, "Reconstructing the Anglo-Latin Aesop: The Literary Tradition of the 'Hexametrical Romulus,'" in *Latin Culture in the Eleventh Century. Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Medieval Latin Studies, Cambridge 1998* (Publications of The Journal of Medieval Latin) 2 (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 1–33. The authors' primary aim is to demonstrate that the *Romulus hexametricus* plays an important role in the tradition of the Aesopic fable in the 11th century, and that an English source common to both Marie and this *Romulus* certainly existed (pp. 30–31).

¹¹¹ Warnke, *Die Fabeln*, Introduction, pp. xlvii–lx.

¹¹² Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 132–35.

¹¹³ Unless otherwise noted, references to Books I–IV are from *Ioannis Sarresberiensis, Policraticus I–IV*, ed. K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (Turnhout, 1993); and Book V–VIII, *Ioannis Sarresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis "Policratici" Libri VIII*, ed. Clemens C.I. Webb (London, 1909).

¹¹⁴ This is particularly interesting in light of our investigation in the chapter "Mirror of Princes."

arguments presented up to this point, we nevertheless note that in two Latin texts (*Romulus Nilantii* II 13; *LBG* 29), a soldier (*miles*) keeps guard¹¹⁵ over the hanged man in order that no one may come and take him down—a detail that is not found in Marie’s fable. She sets out the situation: “Pres de ileoc aveit un larun / que ert pendu pur mesprisun” [Near there was a thief who had been hanged for his crime] (vv. 5–6). Without any transition, in the abrupt manner we sometimes see in the *Lais*, she simply introduces the one who breaks the law by untying the condemned man (vv. 7–8): “Un chevalier le despendi— / sun parent ert—si l’enfui” [A knight who was related to him took him down and buried him] (vv. 7–8). Marie tends not to spend time on details which do not carry her story forward. This is why she does not take the Latin model into consideration. And this means that Marie’s fables are far from being a servile imitation of earlier fables.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Exactly as in the *Policraticus*: “...cum miles, qui cruces servabat, ne quis ad sepulturam corpus detraheret, notasset...” (Book VIII, 2:306, line 16). It is only at a much later point in the anecdote, after numerous novelistic elements which are presented only by John of Salisbury (who took them from the *Satiricon*), that the parents of the dead man come to take him down from the cross, taking advantage of the absence of the soldier, who is busy consoling the widow.

¹¹⁶ On this, see Runte, “Marie de France dans ses fables.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE *FABLES* OF MARIE DE FRANCE AND THE MIRROR OF PRINCES

Charles Brucker

I. *Introduction*

If we are to understand correctly the art of a fabulist such as Marie, we must look at the imitations of her fable.¹ This is made all the more necessary by the fact that some of these attempts at imitating her reveal the existence of common sources on which Marie did not draw, but which were surely not completely unknown to her.²

There are clear affinities between the *Fables* of Marie and some later collections. Karl Warnke and other scholars have shown that these collections, which resemble Marie's version, are dependent on her, rather than *vice versa*. These are the Hebrew collection *Mishle Shu'alim* or *Fables of the Fox* by Berechiah ben Natronai,³ the *Romulus of Robert*,⁴ and the *Promptuarium exemplorum* of Paris.⁵ The collection which

¹ All references to Marie's fables are from my edition, Charles Brucker, *Marie de France, Les Fables: Edition critique accompagnée d'une introduction, d'une traduction, de notes et d'un glossaire* (Louvain, 1st ed. 1991; 2nd ed., 1998); I cite the 2nd edition. English translations of Marie's fables are from Mary Lou Martin, trans., *The Fables of Marie de France* (Birmingham, AL, 1984). Unless otherwise noted, all further English translations throughout are by Brian McNeil.

² In the commentary on the *Fables* which accompanies my edition, where there are no sources in the strict sense of the word, I refer to imitations, which are in fact often highly illuminating.

³ See Haim Schwarzbaum, *The Mishle Shu'alim (Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiah Na-Nakdan. A Study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore* (Tel Aviv, 1979). English translation: Moses Hadas, trans., *Fables of a Jewish Aesop. Translation from the Fox Fables of Berechiah ha-Nakdan* (New York, 1969). See also Karl Warnke, *Die Fabeln der Marie de France*, (Bibliotheca Normannica) 6 (Halle, 1898; rpr. Geneva, 1974), pp. lxxviii ff.

⁴ Léopold Hervieux, ed., *Les Fabulistes latins, depuis le siècle d'Auguste jusqu'à la fin du Moyen Âge*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1884; 2nd ed., 5 vols., 1883–89; New York, 1972), ed. 1884, 2:549–63: a partial imitation of Marie de France, also inspired in part by an Arabic Aesop.

⁵ Ibid.

most closely and most often⁶ imitates the fables of Marie is indubitably the *LBG*.⁷ According to Warnke, the dependence of the *LBG* on Marie's collection (especially in the version of MSS *A* and *D*) is attested by the shared errors. Warnke cites Fable 73 ("The field mouse that wants to get married"),⁸ which corresponds to *LBG* 116. The field mouse wants to have the highest power of nature as its ally and bride. It goes first to the sun, which claims that there is something above it that is more powerful, namely, the cloud which is capable of casting a shadow over the sun. The field mouse then goes to the cloud, but this sends it to the wind, which is superior to it. The wind sends it to the *granz murs de pierre*⁹ or *grant tour de pierre*,¹⁰ which resists all the assaults of the wind, and finally to the tower or the wall, which are undermined by the mouse. The field mouse, which had looked upward, is thus brought down to an animal of its own species. Warnke notes that the editor of *LBG* writes *mur* instead of *turris*. Given that a mouse would be more likely to make its nest at the top of a tower instead of the top of a wall, Warnke looks for the source of this "error" and concludes that since *A* and *D*, which are the oldest manuscripts (and are complete), have the reading *mur* (as opposed to *tour/tor* in *NQ*), the origin of the *LBG* reading is to be found in the collection of Marie's fables; the same applies to the *Romulus of Robert*. However, these arguments do not exclude the possibility that the *LBG* and the *Romulus of Robert* go back in part to an earlier Latin tradition.¹¹

II. *The originality of Marie's fable: The narrative*

If we look at the fables that do not contain any dialogue, and where the narrative flows on without being interrupted by direct speech, it is easy to see the original aspects of the kind of fable Marie writes. To a greater degree than the Latin fables, those in the vernacular—and especially the fables of Marie—attach a great importance to the

⁶ This is obvious from the numerous parallels mentioned in the commentary to my edition of the *Fables*.

⁷ Hervieux, 2:564–649; also known as the *Romuli Anglici cunctis exortae fabulae* or the *Romulus ordinarius*.

⁸ Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 280–89.

⁹ MS *A* and other MSS.

¹⁰ MS *A* and other MSS, e.g. *Q* tors.

¹¹ This is why my commentary attaches great importance to the *LBG*.

logical relationship between the fable itself and the moral reflection or *epimythion*.¹² Dramatization and humanization are major concerns of Marie de France, and these tendencies leave their mark even on the way in which the narrative of the fable is organized.

The art of preparing the dénouement

If we compare the development of the narrative of Marie's fable with that of other fables of various provenance, we see that Marie forgets her models (so to speak)¹³ and follows her intuition as an authentic poet—an intuition she has already demonstrated in the *Lais*. In Marie, the narrative and the fable in its totality are subject to structural demands which are unknown to the Latin models, taken as a whole. In Marie's fable, the descriptive elements are additives to the action, and it is the action that must lead the reader to the dénouement of the story, but also to the moral reflection that is to be drawn from the fable. This means that the descriptive detail concerns fundamental circumstances that are necessary for the understanding and the unfolding of the action. A good example of this kind of organization of the narrative can be found in Fable 58 ("The fox and the reflection of the moon"). The modification of one detail vis-à-vis the Latin text (LBG 47)¹⁴ is enough to allow Marie to reorganize the narrative with a view to the dénouement and the moral reflection.¹⁵ In v. 3,¹⁶ *mare* ("pond") translates the Latin noun *fluentum* ("watercourse" in general), which is linked etymologically to the notion of movement and

¹² See Hans R. Runte's study of the *epimythia* and the *incipit* in his "Marie de France dans ses Fables," in *In Quest of Marie de France. A Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantal A. Maréchal (Lewiston, NY, 1992), pp. 28–44. This has the great merit of taking into account all the manuscripts. Indirectly, this essay also shows how the presence of Marie is a factor which unites the narrative and the moral reflection.

¹³ Sahar Amer convincingly shows that even in those fables which are inspired by the *Romulus Nilantii*, we never find a servile translation, but rather an authentic literary creation, since Marie deliberately parts company with her "model" by refusing to give priority to morality and religion—a trait characteristic of the *Romulus Nilantii*. See her "L'Esopé de Marie de France, *translatio* du *Romulus Nilantii*," in *The Medieval Translator*, ed. Roger Ellis and René Tixier, (Traduire au Moyen Âge) 5 (Turnhout, 1996), pp. 347–61, here p. 351.

¹⁴ Hervieux, 2:547.

¹⁵ Amer attempts to show that as in *Kalilah wa Dimnah*, the moral reflection does not in any way constitute the goal at which the fable aims. The situation in the Latin fable is different. See her *Esopé au féminin: Marie de France et la politique de l'interculturalité* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1999), p. 126.

¹⁶ Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 234–37.

hence of “running water.” This substitution¹⁷ makes the course of the narrative more probable, especially in vv. 4–5: “Quant dedenz l’ewe regarda, / l’umbre de la lune ad veü, / mes ne sot mie quei ceo fu” [Looking into the water, he saw the shadow of the moon, but he didn’t know what it was]. It would have been difficult for the reflection to exist if the surface of the water had not been more or less immobile. And if the water had not been stagnant, Marie’s words in v. 8 would have been equally improbable: “Qu’il ot veü un grant furmage” [that he had seen a big cheese]. Besides this, the French term has a familiar tone and evokes the animal world and the environment in which the fox acts. Finally, if the water was in fact running, v. 11 would verge on absurdity, since the fox attempts to make the water less deep by drinking it: “tresbien quida en sun penser, / si l’ewe de la mare ert mendre, / que le furmage peüst bien prendre” [In his mind, he was perfectly convinced / that if the water of the pond was less deep / he would be able to take the cheese] (vv. 10–12). Even the moral reflection benefits from the care that Marie has taken over the preparation of the narrative. For her narrative leads to the idea that an illusion (*quida*) or a dream can lead to death—an idea that is not explicit in the Latin text.

Logic and conformity to the intellectual patterns of Marie’s epoch

In addition to the attention she pays to the narrative technique, Marie aims at explicitness and completeness in her description of certain aspects of society. Fable 88 concerns the relationships implied by the structures of feudal society. The wolf and the fox, traditional adversaries in the bestiaries and the fables, once again have a dispute: “Un gupil e un lu s’aïrerent / e ensemble se curucerent” [A fox and a wolf were so angry with each other] (vv. 1–2). But Marie, who is considered a mistress of the art of creating psychological tensions between her characters, does not fail to point out the irreparable nature of this conflict: “si que nul nes pot accorder / ne lur raisun a bien turner” [that no one could make peace between them or get them to think reasonably] (vv. 3–4). Nevertheless, the two protagonists decide to appear before the supreme judge of the animal world, namely, the lion, the king of the beasts. In his wisdom, he observes that both of them are

¹⁷ Even if our starting point in principle is that the *LBG* is an imitation of Marie de France, it nevertheless implies the existence of a common Latin source, since the *LBG* is not in any way a translation in the strict sense of the fables of Marie de France.

in the wrong, and dismisses the case: “Nul de eus ne deit estre jugez” [neither of them should be punished] (v. 28). There is no equivalent to this verse in any Latin text of the Aesopic tradition. And yet it is the only verdict that the public ought to expect from the lion. This verse is all the more necessary, in that the entire moral reflection, which is particularly long, is based on the attitude and the judicial behavior of the lion. In this moral reflection, Marie develops her understanding of justice: its primary function is to restore the harmony of the body of society by means of compromise and conciliation, not necessarily to assign responsibilities and chastise the guilty. This is how we should interpret the last words of the moral reflection: “Mes adrescer a sun poër / e l’ire fere remaner” [but should judge fairly and bring an end to the animosity] (vv. 25–26). While she respects the material transmitted to her by the tradition of the bestiaries and the fables,¹⁸ Marie knows how to vary the narrative sequence of the fable, often by the addition of a tiny detail, in order to adapt it to the medieval mentality. The detail in this case is the “lightning flash” of intelligence on the part of the lion. The lion is so clear-sighted that he sees, and gets the others to see, that the truth of human beings (and hence also the truth of animals) can reveal areas of shadow, just as a lie can contain grains of truth (vv. 15–18):

Sa mençunge est plus covenable
e meuz resemble chose estable
que del gupil la veritez:
nul de eus ne deit estre jugez. (vv. 15–18)

[His lying was more in character than the fox’s telling the truth, so neither of them should be punished.]

The lion demonstrates the highest wisdom, that of Greek tragedy, where the heroes accept their finitude and resign themselves at best to safeguarding society: a hero never shows his greatness more truly than in defeat, and this (relatively speaking) is the situation of the lion here.

The skill at driving the action forward

Sometimes a decision or a gesture, apparently harmless in itself, can govern the dramatic organization of an entire fable. This is because Marie de France—contrary to what has been held by generations of

¹⁸ See in this book my chapter “Marie de France and the Fable Tradition.”

critics who were too much preoccupied by the *Lais*—composes her narrative to serve a precise and rigorous conception of the progression of the action that constitutes the structure of the fable.

Seen in this way, some elements take on a new meaning which at first reading may go unnoticed, or appear merely secondary. In order to grasp this, it suffices to look at the composition and the thematic orientation of Fable 4 (“The dog and the ewe”).¹⁹ The ewe is unjustly accused by a “lying dog” of not having given him back a loaf that he had lent to her. The ewe denies this accusation, dismissing it as a sheer lie. The dog appeals for support to two witnesses, the kite and the wolf, who agree wholeheartedly with him because they already see within their grasp the flesh of the future victim, and they are impatient to divide it among themselves. The judge demands that the loaf be restored at all costs, adding perfidiously that “she [the ewe] had lied about a thing of small value,” implying that this made it all the more logical, indeed just, that she should give back something that had been lent to her. Marie underlines the distress of the ewe—a distress both material and psychological, which does not in the least prevent the three accusers from swooping down on her. With a realism that reflects the animal world, but also has obvious implications in the world of human beings, Marie gives the priority to the wolf in her *mise en scène* of the “execution” of the ewe:

E puis li lus, trop est li tart
que la chars fust entre eus destreite,
kar de viande eurent suffreite;
ne la berbiz plus ne vesqui:
sis sires del tut la perdi. (vv. 30–34)

[The wolf was eager to split up the meat amongst them, for they had long been in need of food. Nothing was left of the sheep; her master lost her completely]

These five verses are due exclusively to the “invention” of Marie de France. No equivalent is found in any of the Latin texts, neither in the *Romulus Nilantii*,²⁰ which seems to be the source of this fable, nor in the *LBG*,²¹ which is judged to be an imitation of Marie de France; at most, there are some points of contact. This surely proves that Marie

¹⁹ Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 66–68.

²⁰ Hervieux, vol. 2, I, 4, p. 515.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4, p. 567.

attaches a very specific importance to these few verses, which are not totally lacking in humor, especially in the last verse: "her master had well and truly lost her." The unexpected presence of *sires* shows that the ewe was of considerable economic importance to the lord or squire. This means that there is a competition between the owner and the predators, who are animals. The moral reflection emphasizes the idea of competition or struggle between the various social classes: "Ne lur chaut que li las devienge, / mes que chescun sa part en tienge" [They don't care what becomes of the wretched fellow, provided that each one gets his share of the goods] (vv. 41–42). Marie contrasts the societal law with the biological law (v. 32; see above). This is a good example of the progression in a narrative, accompanied by a broadening of the perspective. Marie's starting point is a simple quarrel between individuals, and she succeeds in adumbrating a societal situation.

Variety of descriptive elements

There are few descriptive elements in a short narrative such as a fable, and this means that the choice of these elements is more decisive than in other contexts. Since the action is very concentrated, the reader is made all the more sensitive to the appropriateness of the physical or psychological description. The essential function of the descriptive attitudes is to lend verisimilitude to the content and the unfolding of the action. Marie seldom indulges in a minute, heavy description which would risk putting a brake upon the progression of the action. She prefers to use one stroke of her brush, suggesting the character or the thought of an animal in the fable by means of the evocative sketch of an attitude or a gesture. This is what she does in Fable 67 ("The crow who finds the feathers of a peacock").²² At the very beginning, the crow compares itself to other birds—an element not found in any of the Latin texts: "Si s'esguarda tut environ: / plus vil se tient que nul oisel, / pur ceo qu'il ne se vit si bel" [He looked himself up and down and decided that he was more wretched than any bird because he wasn't as handsome] (vv. 4–6). Although some have chosen to see Marie as an extreme moralizer, it must surely be recognized that this expression is measured and marked by discretion. When the crow puts

²² Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 254–65. See also Brucker, "La conception du récit dans la fable ésoquique en langue vulgaire: de Marie de France à Steinhöwel," in *Actes du colloque "le Récit bref au moyen âge"* (Amiens, 1979), p. 395.

on the peacock's feathers, Marie does not feel the need to return to the theme of his pride, unlike the Latin fabulist of the *LBG*: "Incedens ergo in his, tamquam regio contextu ornatus, gloriose inter pavones discussione pennarum, se illis non solum conferre, sed preferre cepit" [Then he strutted proudly among the peacocks as if adorned with a royal robe, spreading out his wings, and he began not only to compare himself to them, but to prefer himself to them]. Marie is content with one single reflection: "Puis s'assembla od les poüins" [Then he joined the group of peacocks] (v. 11). Marie systematically refuses to employ descriptive elements which contribute nothing either to the various phases of the action or to the preparation of these phases. Sometimes, however, Marie embarks on a description that is more detailed than that of the Latin fabulist. Her intention in such cases is to bring out one idea which ought logically to exclude another idea—but which in reality does not exclude it. In Fable 17 ("The swallow and the sower of linseed"), her description underlines the clear-sightedness of the swallow, which has perfectly understood the goal of the man's activity: "L'arunde fu de si grant savoir; / bien s'aperceut ke par le lin / sereint oiseus mis a lur fin" [The swallow was very wise. She was well aware that birds would be killed because of the flax] (vv. 4–6). Nevertheless, everything happens as if the swallow and the other birds had known nothing about the man's intentions, since he ends by exterminating them in exactly the way he had envisaged before the intervention of the swallow.²³ Marie's desire to delineate the absurdity of the birds' behavior made it necessary for her to provide all this psychological description. In her mind, the birds may well represent the people, who let themselves be fooled by the high and mighty.²⁴

²³ It should be recalled that the swallow had made a kind of pact with the farmer: "He will tolerate its nest in his house" (v. 21).

²⁴ This aspect is one of the elements found in the mirrors of princes. Unless otherwise noted, references to John of Salisbury are as follows: Books I–IV are from *Ioannis Sarresberiensis, Policraticus I–IV*, ed. K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (Turnhout, 1993) [hereafter Keats-Rohan]; and Book V–VIII, *Ioannis Sarresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis "Policratici" Libri VIII*, ed. Clemens C.I. Webb (London, 1909) [hereafter Webb]. See *Policraticus* VIII, 20 (Webb, 2:374); see also Denis Foulechat, VIII 20, 28: "Et ce non obstant l'en ne me meneroit legierement par aucune persuasion a croire que le people qui estoit de dure teste et de cuer si obstiné que on ne le pouoit flechir a raison... si desservi de avoir tyrans pour rois" [In spite of this, nobody would easily make me believe that the people who were so stubborn and so hard-hearted that they could not be led to right mind, should be governed by tyrants in all fairness as if they were kings] (my translation).

The role of the animal characters in the organization of the narrative

Generally speaking, the animals which populate those Latin fables that Marie could have known retain their original characteristics throughout the narrative, and evoke only to a relatively small degree the human beings who find themselves in similar situations. This is the case with the fables of Phaedrus; and although Marie was not inspired directly by them, they must have been among the Latin texts to which she had access.

In Marie, the animals are humanized to an extent unknown in the Latin fable. She humanizes the animal characters by means of interrogation or the attribution of perplexity. In Fable 58 ("The fox and the reflection of the moon"), Marie informs us about the emotions of the fox by sketching briefly three elements: the perplexity, the lengthy meditation, and the longing kindled by an illusory food which in reality belongs to the world of human beings: "Mes ne sot mie quei ceo fu. / Puis ad pensé en sun curage / qu'il ot veü un grant furmage" [But he didn't know what it was. Then he truly thought that he had seen a big cheese] (vv. 6–8). These three elements suffice to mobilize at once the reaction of the animal, which is moved by hunger or by greed: "L'ewe commence a laper" [He began to lap at the water] (v. 9). Marie immediately presents a completely human logic that unfolds in the "spirit" of the fox, which calculates exactly the consequences of his action—and above all, measures all the advantages that he could get from it: "Tresbien quida en sun penser, / si l'ewe de la mare ert mendre, / que le furmage peüst bien prendre" [Really believing that he could get the cheese if there were less water in the pond] (vv. 10–12). Marie, who is a perceptive observer of human reactions, definitely emphasizes the three phases of the reflection and the imagination of the fox. He begins by taking a step back and looking at the situation that confronts him (*tresbien quida*); he explicitly formulates the hypothesis about emptying the pond by lapping up the water that fills it (*l'ewe*); finally, he envisages the happy outcome of his undertaking, which is focused entirely and exclusively on the object of all his desires, the cheese (*le furmage*). These three stages are ingeniously emphasized by the position of the key words in the respective verses.

This attitude of being a thinker, one who calculates, one who speculates (even going to excesses) is also represented by the crow in Fable 67 ("The crow who finds peacock feathers").²⁵ After he is beaten by the

²⁵ Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 256–59.

peacocks, who do not acknowledge him as one of their own, the crow attempts to return to his fellow crows. This is an innovation on Marie's part, since this element of the narrative does not exist in the Latin fables of her epoch: "Dunc s'en revolt as corps aler, / si cum einz fist, corp ressembler" [Then he wanted to return to the crows and look like a crow again] (vv. 15–16). The motif of *folie de grandeur* is well and truly castigated in the last verse of the fable, i.e. the last verse of the moral reflection. The moral reflection in LBG 59 has none of the sharpness and comprehensiveness that we find in Marie:²⁶ "E le lur perdent par folie" [And they foolishly lose what they had] (v. 25). In this one word *folie*, Marie sums up the behavior of the crow, which could be the behavior of some great man who is perpetually dissatisfied with his situation and whose undertakings are doomed to failure, since they lack all moderation.

Sometimes, the presence of Marie can be sensed in the narrative itself, i.e. outside the *promythia* and *epimythia*.²⁷ The personalization of certain elements in the narrative seems to originate in the endeavor to achieve stylistic effects such as the discrepancy between the narrative and the narrator—a discrepancy that is a component of her humor. Marie concludes the body of Fable 58, mentioned above, in a personal manner: "Tant ad beü que il creva; / ileoc cheï, puis ne leva" [He had drunk so much that he burst: he fell there, and he did not get up again.] (vv. 13–14). The discrepancy can be seen in the abrupt style of the last verse and in the contrast between the quantitative presentation of one action (*ad beü*)²⁸ and the description of several other actions that are juxtaposed to it (*creva, cheï, leva*). The last of these bears a negative value, and the negation is in fact particularly suggestive: thanks to his "folly," the fox no longer belongs to this world. None of the Latin fables earlier than Marie or from her own period presents the end of the fox as seen from the outside by the fabulist. In this manner, Marie judiciously prepares the moral reflection, which inevitably has a personal tone,²⁹ because it is based on the fabulist's

²⁶ Hervieux, 2:604–05.

²⁷ On this question, see Runte, "Marie de France dans ses Fables."

²⁸ This is the equivalent of a present perfect.

²⁹ The tone is all the more personal in that Marie does not have recourse here to the formula *cest essample*, which we find elsewhere at the beginning of the moral reflection and which is clear evidence of the existence of a tradition. See Runte, "Marie de France dans ses Fables," pp. 31–32.

own experience (even if one can discern a moralizing tradition in the background).

Beyond reality

The difference between the Latin fables and Marie's fables is even more strongly underlined by the insertion into her fables of miraculous elements, although, taken as a whole, these are relatively rare. The miraculous Christian element is completely unknown to the Latin fables, but we find it in Fable 99 ("The man and the ship"), which illustrates the fickleness of the human being who does not hesitate to invoke God on every occasion in order to satisfy the least of his own desires—but God seems no longer to answer him when he is really in need of help. Marie takes obvious pleasure in intensifying the fickleness of this character by putting her finger on his inconsistencies, which are not mentioned at all in LBG 103:³⁰ "Einz qu'il se fust aparceüz, / dedenz la mer est enbatuz. / Lors prie Deus qu'il meint a tere" [Before he realized it, he had sailed off into the sea. Then he asked God to direct him to land] (vv. 5–7). It is at this precise moment that the Latin fable (unlike Marie's fable) presents the motif of the tempest, which justifies a new prayer that is formulated explicitly.³¹ The Latin text evokes the difficulties of a man on the high seas.³² This difference has two consequences. First of all, the absence of any direct cause of the inverse movement in the French text (when compared to the Latin *verso remigio*) is already an indication of the presence of a supernatural power. Second, the lack of any mention of the persistence of the tempest suggests the idea that the boat is being restrained by God himself, and that although God is present among human beings, this is not intended to satisfy their whims. And it is this idea that is proposed by the moral reflection which is linked in Marie to the structure of the narrative.³³

³⁰ Hervieux, 2:645.

³¹ Here one thinks inevitably of the supernatural—though of a different nature—which runs through the *Lais*, especially a *lai* such as *Eliduc*.

³² "...obviantibus undis impeditus est..."

³³ "Kar meuz seit Deu quei li estut..." [For God knows better what he needs...] (v. 21).

III. *The Fables: A mirror of princes*

Key words of feudal society

The descriptive elements necessarily include all that concerns life in society, especially the principal actors of the various social classes.³⁴ Very frequently, it is the presentation of social realities³⁵ that distinguishes Marie's narrative from that of the Latin fables. Thanks to these elements, Marie's narrative—which shows us the animals acting like human beings—gains verisimilitude. Unlike the Latin fables, Marie specifies the social rank of the persons she evokes, often employing an adjective that is intended to give support to the logic of the narrative. Fable 99 ("The man and the ship") is a good example of this tendency. The adjective *riches* (v. 1), the second word in this fable, enhances the capricious character of a man who is not content with exercising power over others, but even puts to the test the power of God. It is as if he wished indirectly to measure himself against the supreme power that rules the world and the universe:³⁶ "Un riches hum voleit aler / utre une mer pur converser" [A rich man wanted to go across the sea to visit] (vv. 1–2). The place occupied by this adjective in the lexical network of social values in the literature of the 12th century is well known:³⁷ it encompasses the ideas of wealth and of political and social power. In this fable, Marie indirectly castigates the excessive pursuit of this power. Like John of Salisbury, Marie is well acquainted with the innumerable disputes of the lords and kings of her age, who were always ready to snatch a territory or a town from their neighbors. The moral reflection, in a very moderate tone, warns the *riche* against the temptation of asking ever more of fate. It is indubitable that the terms *sage* and *reisnablement* are a disguised admonition addressed

³⁴ See Jean Batany, "Traditions littéraires et conjonctures sociales," *Bien dire et bien apprendre* 5 (1987), 27–41.

³⁵ This does not necessarily entail a "dissociation between the narrative and the moral reflection"—a reproach addressed by Amer to those critics who seek to accord a positive value to, or indeed to enhance, the feudal aspect of the *Fables* (*Esope au féminin*, p. 94).

³⁶ In the Introduction to her translation of the *Fables*, Martin has ably demonstrated the primary importance that Marie accords to respect for hierarchy, in the political, feudal, and family spheres.

³⁷ See Glyn S. Burgess, *Contribution à l'étude du vocabulaire pré-courtois* (Geneva, 1970). See also the collocations of *riche*, juxtaposed to a term such as *sen(s)*, which forms part of the lexical network of *sage*: Charles Brucker, *Sage et Sagesse au Moyen Âge* (Geneva, 1987), for example, p. 320.

to the courtiers of Henry II Plantagenet,³⁸ and perhaps to the king in person. Besides this, Marie's repetition of the name *Deu*³⁹ cannot be wholly anodyne, when we bear in mind the confiscations of some ecclesiastical property in the reign of Henry II and his conflicts with the Church, especially with John of Salisbury and Thomas Becket, and when we recall John's ferocious criticisms of the administrators in the 5th book of his *Policraticus*, the earliest medieval mirror of princes properly speaking.⁴⁰ This is the earliest treatise about governance, and although it is addressed to Thomas Becket, it is in reality destined for Henry II.

In addition to its specifically "didactic" value, a key word in feudal society can have a precise function in the unfolding of the narrative. For example, in Fable 101 ("The cat who wore a miter"), the noun *felun* closes the narrative.⁴¹ This allows Marie to pronounce a judgment on the conduct of the cat and in a certain sense to punish this: throughout the narrative, the cat has employed perfidy, imposture, and treachery in order to achieve its own ends.

A more complex instance, one that is richer in meaning because it contains a measure of ambiguity, is Fable 17 ("The swallow and the sower of linseed"), which illustrates the concepts of "lineage" and "blood relationship" in the feudal system. A swallow realizes what the farmer intends to do with the linseed that he has sown, namely, to make nets to capture the swallows. She advises her companions to eat the linseed, but they refuse and denounce the swallow to the farmer. Finally, she is reconciled to him, and they make an agreement: she will allow his linseed to grow, and he will tolerate her nest in his house. Nevertheless, the farmer does not stop making his nets and capturing the swallows. The moral reflection (which owes nothing to the Latin fables) emphasizes the prince who does not know how to follow good

³⁸ The allusion in the Prologue "ki flurs est de chevalerie, / d'enseignement, de curtesie" could refer to Henry II. See Warnke, *Die Fabeln*, p. cxviii.

³⁹ "Li sages deit reisnablement / prier a Deu omnipotent / que de lui face sun plaisir: / de ceo li peot grant bien venir. / Kar meuz seit Deu quei li estut / que sis queors, qu'il li change u mut" [Reason obliges the wise man to pray to God Almighty to do with him what pleases Him; this can lead to a very good outcome. For God knows what he needs, better than his own heart, which never ceases to change] (vv. 17–22).

⁴⁰ The mirrors of princes in the Carolingian age are often content with imparting very general counsels borrowed from Deuteronomy and rarely get involved in very precise criticisms of the way things are run.

⁴¹ "mut cremment [= the mice] sa cunfermeisun, / kar il le sevent a felun" [They were very much afraid of the sacrament of confirmation from her, because they knew how cunning she was] (vv. 17–18).

advice, or does not wish to do so, or who is unable to distinguish the flatterers from the faithful servants or vassals in his entourage:

Quant fous ne veut le sage creire,
 ki bon conseil li deit duner
 et de sun mal le volt oster,
 si damage l'en deit venir,
 dunc est trop tart del repentir. (vv. 30–34)

[If a fool does not want to believe the wise man who can give him good advice and wants to keep him from his misfortune, and if harm comes of it, then it is too late to be sorry.]

Here, Marie illustrates the point of view of the bad prince who bases his conduct on the insinuations and the instigations of the flatterers who are castigated with such virulence by John of Salisbury throughout his *Policraticus*, and especially in Book III.⁴² Here the flatterers, i.e. the companions who denounce⁴³ the swallow to the farmer, will be caught in their own trap. A second lesson can be gleaned from the fable as Marie presents it, namely, a kind of praise of the swallow, who is faithful to the principle of solidarity which bonds together the members of one and the same lineage and blood relationship. In the name of this principle, she overlooks the treachery of the other birds. She brings them together and goes with them to the farmer in order to be reconciled to him for the sake of their common interest:

Quant l'arundel l'⁴⁴ot escuté
 cum il l'aveient encusee,
 de ses parenz fist asemblee
 od les meilleurs de sa lignee,
 si s'est al vilein appeisee.⁴⁵ (vv. 16–20)

[When the swallow heard how they had denounced her, she got together a group of her relatives, including the best of her lineage and made peace with the farmer.]

⁴² For example in ch. 3, which has the very significant title: "Adulatores puniendos esse tamquam hostes deorum et hominum et veritatem gratanter amplexendam et patientiam custodiendam tam rationibus quam exemplis majorum" [That the flatterers ought to be punished as enemies of the gods and of men; and that one should gratefully embrace the truth; and that patience should be preserved both by the reasons put forward by our ancestors as well as by their examples] (Keats-Rohan, p. 220, lines 1–3).

⁴³ Denunciation, a form of treachery (cf. *felun*), is a motif specific to Marie in the framework of this fable.

⁴⁴ Neutral ("that"), a kind of correlative of *cum*.

⁴⁵ Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 110–13.

But despite her good intentions and her foresight, the swallow does not get the upper hand, even though the compromise appears to have worked out to her advantage. The final failure is emphasized by a formulaic expression that is somewhat peremptory: “Dunc prist oisels granz e menurs” [...with which he caught birds both large and small] (v. 26). All these elements skillfully prepare the moral reflection: the sagacity of one individual is not enough to compensate for the folly of all. From the Carolingian mirrors of princes onwards, the principles of justice⁴⁶ and of the common interest⁴⁷ had been regarded as the central element of the behavior of princes and rulers, but it is only from the 12th century onwards, under the influence of the political and social treatise by John of Salisbury, that these ideas became firmly established in the culture of the epoch.

Marie's fables, a mirror of princes

The first thing we notice in Marie's Prologue is the clear indication she gives that she will take as her model the emperor Romulus,⁴⁸ who wrote a letter to his son to give him counsels about government and politics:

Romulus, ki fu emperere,
a sun filz escrit, si manda
et par essample li mostra
cum il se deust cuntregaiter
que hum nel peüst enginner. (vv. 12–16)

[Romulus, who was emperor, wrote to his son, setting out for him and showing him by means of examples how he ought to be on his guard against the deceitful ways of human beings.]

Both the turn of mind and the methods employed by Marie show that she consciously follows the tradition of the mirrors of princes,⁴⁹ while remaining faithful to the rules of the genre of *exempla*, which in many cases draw on bestiaries or themselves become bestiaries.

⁴⁶ *Policraticus*, IV, 4: “The prince is subject to the law of justice.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.1: the prince must act “in accordance with what brings profit to all.”

⁴⁸ This is pure fiction, although the name may perhaps evoke the last of the Roman emperors, Romulus Augustulus.

⁴⁹ Amer has a tendency to minimize this aspect of the *Fables*, since she believes that Marie goes beyond “the traditional categorical and hierarchical opposition between *historia* and *fabula*” (*Esope au féminin*, p. 103).

Although this idea is not clearly expressed in the verses quoted above, the bestiary is indirectly evoked in the following verses, where Aesop and his fable (usually concerning animals) enter the Prologue—even if “Aesop” here is a generic term designating the Aesopic fable.⁵⁰

Esopes escrist a sun mestre
que bien cunust lui et sun estre,
unes fables ke ot trovees,
de griu en latin translatees. (vv. 17–20)⁵¹

[Aesop, who well knew his master and his way of thinking, wrote for him a collection of fables which he had composed and translated from Greek into Latin.]

There is a remarkable analogy between this supposed Aesop and Marie, since she too claims to be presenting a work of translation:

Li reis Alvrez, que mut l'ama,
le translata puis en engleis,
et jeo l'ai rime en franceis,
si cum jeo poi plus proprement. (Epilogue, vv. 16–19)

[King Alfred, who esteemed it highly, then translated it into English, and I have rendered it, exactly as I found it, into French verse.]

Above all, however, both *Romulus* and *Aesop* involve a letter containing recommendations, and it is hard not to see in these remarks an allusion to the alleged “Letter” of Plutarch to Trajan in Book V of the *Policraticus*. Just like the letters of “Aesop” and “Romulus,” this too is a mirror of princes included in another mirror—a much larger mirror constituted by the *Policraticus* as a whole. It is certain that Marie de France in turn, in the context of a very specific literary genre, intends to employ the tonality of the fable to present to her sovereign, Henry II, the mirror of the society over which he must preside and which he must govern.

Idealism and realism

This inevitably involves an ideal society, which is depicted in the moral reflection of a fable that is not in the least ideal—and that sends the

⁵⁰ In Aesop properly speaking, only 25.8 per cent of the fables do not concern animals in any way; but this statistic has a purely indicative value with regard to the animal/non-animal tendency in the Aesopic tradition in the broadest sense. See *Aesopi Fabulae*, ed. Emile Chambry, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1960), p. xxxvi.

⁵¹ Marie may perhaps be thinking of Phaedrus.

reader back to the somewhat disappointing reality of everyday life. This mediocrity is due in part to the mentality and the frame of mind of human beings, especially in the sphere of religion. In the center of the collection,⁵² Fables 54 and 55⁵³ show us how the human being conceives of his relationship to God and, more specifically, of prayer. In Fable 54, a man goes into a church and asks God to give him another horse, one that is as good as the horse he already has. During this prayer, thieves steal the horse which had been tethered outside the church, and so the man once again addresses God to ask him to restore his horse to him, promising that from now on, he will be content with what he has. The formulation of the lesson that he draws from this experience is marked by a great fervor. Clearly, Marie attaches great importance to this lesson, because it also applies to the princes who ought to be content with the goods, and still more with the territories, that they already possess:

Si prie Deu devotement
que autre chose ne requereit
n'autre cheval mar li dureit,
mes face li aver le suen,
kar il n'avera jamais si buen. (vv. 12–16)

[(He) devoutly prayed to God not to give him another horse, and to do nothing else but let him have his own horse back, because he would never again have one so good.]

This aspect is appropriate to a genuine mirror of princes, and it is confirmed by the moral reflection, although this does not contain any terms which would explicitly guide the reader to draw this conclusion:

Pur ceo ne deit nul hum preier
de plus aver qu'il n'a mester:
ceo gart ke Deus li ad doné,
si li suffise en leauté. (vv. 17–20)⁵⁴

[Thus no one should pray to have more than he needs. He should keep what God has given him, and it should be sufficient to him indeed.]

⁵² Although it is virtually impossible to make a rigorous classification of Marie's fables, the place occupied by any particular fable can turn out to be important.

⁵³ See Karen K. Jambeck, "The Fables of Marie de France: A Mirror of Princes," in Maréchal, *In Quest of Marie de France*, p. 78.

⁵⁴ This must be understood in the sense of "faithfulness to the principle of distributive justice," which is one of the qualities required if the government is to function well.

In Chapter 2 of the 4th book of his mirror of princes, John of Salisbury declares that one must not deviate from the *aequitas justitiae*.⁵⁵ He recalls the traditional definition of this idea, for those who may not have grasped it: “Porro aequitas, ut juris periti asserunt, rerum convenientia est quae cuncta coaequiparat ratione et paribus rebus paria jura desiderat, in omnes aequabilis, tribuens unicuique quod suum est” [Now equity, as the legal scholars declare, is a fitness of things that compares everything rationally and requires applying similar rules to similar cases. It has an impartial attitude to all persons, giving to each one what is his own] (Keats-Rohan, p. 234, lines 6–9).

Princes and subjects

Marie does not fail to specify her own view about the relationship between the prince and his subjects,⁵⁶ or vice versa. In the lengthy Fable 46 (“The birds and their king”), the blue tit is sent by the birds to look for a bird that they could appoint as their king. After advisedly rejecting a certain number of birds, its choice falls on the eagle, and Marie intervenes in her own name⁵⁷—something that happens rarely in the middle of a fable—to tell us the reason for this:

A cel conseil se sunt tenu,
e si unt esgardé e veü
que de l'egle ferunt lur rei;
e si vus sai bien dire pur quei:
li egles ad bele grandur,
si est asez de grant valor;
mut est sobres e atemprez;
si une feiz est bien saülez,

⁵⁵ Keats-Rohan, p. 234, lines 3–6: “Nec in eo sibi principes detrahi arbitrentur, nisi justitiae suae statuta praeferenda crediderint justitiae Dei, cujus justitia justitia in aevum est et lex ejus aequitas” [Princes should not think that it detracts from their dignity to believe that the decrees of their own justice are not to be preferred to the justice of God, whose justice is eternal and whose law is equity].

⁵⁶ In general, one is struck here by Marie’s rational conservatism: each one should remain in his own place. This idea is expressed clearly in the moral reflection in several fables: 22, 26, 74, and 76; see the commentary on Fable 15 by Mary Lou Martin in her dissertation, *The Fables of Marie de France: A Critical Commentary with English Translation* (Diss., University of Texas, 1979, DAI 40:7, 1980), pp. 62–63. Revised and reprinted as her translation (see note 1). Similarly, Marie does not approve of women who take initiatives (Fable 72), nor of women who adopt attitudes deliberately opposed to those of their husbands.

⁵⁷ On the “I” of Marie, see Runte, “Marie de France dans ses Fables,” especially the detailed analysis of this question (pp. 29–31).

bien repeot jeuner après,
 qu'il n'est de preie trop engrés.
 Prince se deit bien resposer,
 ne se deit mie trop deliter,
 lui ne sun regné aviler
 ne la povre gent essilier. (vv. 55–68)⁵⁸

[They all held to this advice and concluded that they would make the eagle their king. I can easily tell you why: the eagle has a handsome size and is very worthy; he is very sober and temperate; once he is sated, he can easily fast afterwards, so that he isn't too desirous of pray. A prince should rest well and not exert himself every day, nor torment his kingdom nor mistreat the poor people.]

These verses contain the entire program of education which John of Salisbury sets out for a future king. Courage: there are many passages in the *Policraticus* which employ anecdotes to praise the personal valor (*valor*) of the king, a valor that is displayed in war,⁵⁹ but is primarily a moral courage (ed. Keats-Rohan, IV.11, lines 47–66).⁶⁰ Measure and moderation (*sobres e atemprez*): moderation should guide the prince when he administers justice, both in his severity and in his mildness (ibid., IV.8, lines 1–2).⁶¹ Marie heavily underlines this point by indicating in vv. 12–13 that a king (in this instance, the eagle) has a natural goodness, so that he is basically not inclined to an excessive greed (*engrés*). Finally, restraint in every way: John gives a perfect example of the opposite quality when he writes about Caligula in IV.18 (II, p. 360, lines 15–29).⁶² One must know how to withdraw from action

⁵⁸ In other words, the prince should not behave like a tyrant. It is well known that this was a primary concern of John of Salisbury (e.g. *Policraticus* IV.1 or VIII.23).

⁵⁹ For specifically military courage, see VI.18 (Webb, 2:48, lines 4ff.).

⁶⁰ This anecdote concerns Alexander the Great and closes with the words: “et veritas suis viribus constans de malitia quamvis armata triumphat” [And the truth, steadfast in its strength, conquers evil, even when the evil is armed].

⁶¹ The very title of this chapter is highly suggestive: “De moderatione justitiae et clementiae principis quae debent in eo ad utilitatem rei publicae temperari” [About the moderation and the clemency of the prince, which must be tempered in the general interest] (Keats-Rohan, p. 258, my translation). Both concepts emphasize the public interest. This moderation is essential also in the case of a military victory on Scipio Africanus: “Again, who was more moderate in the great glory of such a noble victory than that citizen of Rome?” Denis Foulechat, *Le “Policratique” de Jean de Salisbury, Livres I–III*, ed. Charles Brucker (Geneva, 1994), III.10.31.

⁶² See also Fable 96 of Marie, vv. 22–26: “...le coveitus et le aver / veulent tuz jurs tant comencer, / et si se veulent enhaucer, / si enpernent par lur utage / que lur turne a grant damage” [...the greedy and the miserly will always lust after so much and want to raise their standing. They attempt so much through their foolishness that their honor turns to misfortune].

(*resposer*),⁶³ and one must avoid seeking pleasure at all costs (*deliter*) while neglecting one's own honor (*aviler*) and that of the kingdom,⁶⁴ or crushing the people (*essilier*).⁶⁵

Justice and the judges

Marie's indictment of all those who administer justice is formulated with exceptional severity in the moral reflection of Fable 2 ("The wolf and the lamb").⁶⁶ The narrative itself clearly shows⁶⁷ the cunning and the cruelty of the character of the wolf:

Issi funt li riche seignur,
li vescuente e li jugeür
de ceus qu'il unt en lur justice;
faus' acheisuns par coveitise
treovent asez pur eus cunfundre,
suvent les funt a pleit somundre
le char lur tolent e la pel,
si cum li lus fist a l'aïgnel. (vv. 31–38)

[The rich...barons, the viscounts, and the judges do the same thing to those whom they have within their power. Out of greed they find enough false accusations to condemn them, and frequently they have them charged with a lawsuit. They take away their flesh and blood, just as the wolf did to the lamb.]

It is in the 5th Book⁶⁸ of his *Policraticus* that John of Salisbury reaches the culminating point of his criticism of the administration of Henry II. It is here that he examines justice, both in the sense of the judiciary and in the sense of a source of judgment and condemnation, from the perspective of Roman law and from the perspective of the divine justice, as this is praised in the biblical writings. Chapter 16 is directly concerned with the corruption of the judges. John begins by appealing

⁶³ Fable 46, v. 65.

⁶⁴ Ibid., v. 67.

⁶⁵ Ibid., v. 68.

⁶⁶ Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 52–55.

⁶⁷ Amer demonstrates that in a certain number of fables, Marie innovates by including in the narrative a part of the lesson that is to be drawn, sometimes by means of the protagonist in the story (*Esope au féminin*, p. 122).

⁶⁸ This Book may indeed be considered the thematic and argumentative center of the *Policraticus*. And John has taken great pains over the structure of its composition and its arguments, which are more rigorous and pertinent than in other passages of the work. On this, see my analysis of Book V in my edition, with commentary of this part of John's work (pp. 68–92).

to Roman law in condemnation of the corruption in legal matters and in commercial or financial transactions (§ 1). The law to which John refers is exceptionally severe with regard to the governors who have stripped their provinces bare (§ 2). And John has no illusions about what will happen to his recommendations, all the more so since the laws have the appearance of “snares laid down by the false accusers” (§ 4).

Marie goes even further in her description of the cruelty of the powerful towards the weak in Fable 4 (“The ewe and the dog”),⁶⁹ where the dog, the kite, and the wolf falsely accuse the ewe of refusing to return the bread that the dog had lent it. In the middle of the fable, Marie sets out her personal viewpoint: “Savez pur quei chescun le fist? / Qu’il en atendeint partie, / si la berbiz perdist la vie” [Do you know why each one did this? Because if the sheep lost her life, they were expecting a share] (vv. 16–18). The ewe is obliged to sell her wool. It is winter, and she dies of cold. Marie, without any transition, emphasizes the ferocity of the three accusers:

Li chiens i vient, sa leine en porte,
e li escufles d’autre part,
e puis li lus, trop est li tart
que la chars fust entre eus destreinte. (vv. 28–31)

[The dog came and carried away his portion, and the kite likewise, and then the wolf. The wolf was eager to split up the meat amongst them.]

The moral reflection looks very much like an admonition addressed to the princes and the great men who make use of the judicial system in order to bring the weak unjustly to their destruction:

De meint hume le puis pruver,
ki par mentir et par tricher
funt les povres suvent pleider;
faus testimonies sovent traient,
de l’aveir as povres les apaient. (vv. 36–40)

[I want to illustrate something that is proven by the many men who frequently have trumped-up lawsuits brought against the poor. They bring out false witnesses and pay them with the good of the poor.]

It is precisely these false accusers who are the target of the acid criticisms of John of Salisbury in Book V; but in Chapter 16, it is not only those holding temporal power who are castigated for their greed and

⁶⁹ Brucker, *Fables*, pp. 64–69.

their lack of even the most elementary justice. The criticism applies equally to the members of the clergy, especially the higher clergy. John begins by envisaging one very specific category, namely, the deans and archdeacons: "There is no crime among the clergy that these do not commit" (§ 9). Skillfully—and somewhat slyly—John speaks of the bishops, employing the mode of regret when he reproaches them: he expresses his regret at not finding a whole list of qualities in them. He takes an increasingly sharp tone when he points specifically to the abuses: "In any case, I do not know how they can escape infamy and all punishment, when they demand at least two-thirds of the taxies that are levied, and the totality of the fraudulent gains" (§ 10). A little further on, he adds: "But not even the legates of the Apostolic See hold back their hands and refuse all gifts. Sometimes, in the provinces where they have authority, they cast off all restraint, as if Satan had escaped the eyes of the Lord in order to chastise the church. They shake down every corner of the house in order to strike the sons and the daughters of the one who healed the sufferings and pains of souls on the cross." The tone intensifies in § 11, which resembles Marie's moral reflection: "In their eyes, justice is nothing other than a public merchandise, and the knight approves of the commerce in the trial where he is judge. They whitewash the villain in return for bribes, they rejoice over the most terrible events, they hold a feast when misfortunes occur..."

The courtiers

Neither Marie nor John deals kindly with the courtiers. Marie goes to town (so to speak) in Fable 34 ("The king of the monkeys"),⁷⁰ which is set at the court of the monkey emperor who asks for nothing other than to be flattered. The cunning and flattering courtier is honored "to such a point that they all prostrated themselves before him." His companion, who is honest and sincere, is arrested: "Le leal humë unt dunc pris, / si l'unt désiré et maumis; / pur sun veir dit li firent hunte" [They took hold of the honest man, tortured him and ill treated him; because he had told the truth, he was treated in an infamous manner] (vv. 53–55). John dedicates one entire section of his work, the first three books, to the *nugis curialium* ("the frivolities and follies of the courtiers"), and flattery is a main element of Book III. The titles of some of the chapters are eloquent; one example is Chapter 6, "Quod

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 162–67.

adulatores multiplicati sunt super numerum et a praeclaris domibus honestos et dissimiles sui expellunt” [That flatterers have multiplied beyond number and expel from noble houses those who are honest and are not like themselves].⁷¹ John also prefixes an introductory poem, the *Entheticus minor*, to the *Policraticus*, presenting the court as a place full of dangers when he dedicates his work to the chancellor Thomas Becket and offers him advice. The first lines speak for themselves:

Si michi credideris, linguam cohibebis et aulae
limina non intret pes tuus: esto domi.
Aspectus hominum cautus vitare memento, et tibi commissas claude,
libelle, notas.
Omnia sint suspecta tibi, quia publicus hostis
et majestatis diceris esse reus (vv. 1–5)⁷²

[Take my word for it: hold your tongue and do not let your foot cross the threshold of the palace: stay at home. Remember to exercise caution in avoiding people’s gaze, and lock up safely the notes that have been entrusted to you, my little book. Be suspicious of everything, because you will be said to be a public enemy, and charged with lèse-majesté.]

We should compare this recommendation with Marie’s Fable 36 (“The lion and the fox”), where the fox needs to be persuaded to enter the forest and replies as follows to the lion, whose intentions are far from being pure:

“Sire,” fet il, “n’i os aler
kar n’en vei nulle returner
des bestes quë einz i entrerent
e pur vus veer i alerent.” (vv. 21–24)

[“Sire, I don’t dare approach, for I see none of the animals returning who went before me to see you.”]

The moral reflection, which presents troubling analogies to the *Entheticus* which we have mentioned above, is even clearer about the danger represented by the court:

De curt a rei est ensement:
tels i entre legerement,
meuz li vaudreit ensus ester
pur les nuveles escuter. (vv. 25–28)⁷³

⁷¹ Keats-Rohan, p. 185.

⁷² Ibid., p. 9.

⁷³ This passage is quoted without a commentary by Karen K. Jambeck, “Mirror of Princes,” p. 84; on the same question, see pp. 86ff.

[A king's court is likewise: many who enter there lightly would do better to stay outside in order to hear what happens.]

The concision of the language in these verses, imposed in part by her employment of the octosyllable, only serves to intensify Marie's affirmations. This gives her the appearance of one who is infallible, and she elevates herself to the rank of the "philosophers" whom she invokes in her Prologue (v. 5). She is firmly convinced that she is offering to "the one who is the flower of knighthood" (v. 31) a "mirror of princes" of a new kind, where the lightness of the story goes well with the political and social analyses.

Creation in a spirit of independence

While respecting the canons of the "fable," which still retain aspects proper to the bestiaries, Marie gives the genre a remarkable enrichment by including in the thematic tradition her own personal experience of the world, and especially of the political world and of the social spheres in which she moves. This is the world of John of Salisbury, whose *chef d'œuvre* was known to her and whom she could have met. Everything indicates that the personality and the person of Marie are inseparable from the composition of her *Fables*. This position is confirmed strongly in the essay by Runte,⁷⁴ who shows that Marie's presence in her fables is real and ultimately incontestable. His detailed examination of the formulaic expressions which contain the first-person pronoun is completely convincing; he demonstrates⁷⁵ clearly that at least some⁷⁶ of Marie's fables do not appear to have any link to the *Romulus*. She may have found inspiration in stories (Fable 34), proverbs (Fable 80), or sermons (Fable 52). Marie knows how to handle the material of the *Fables* in a highly personal spirit.⁷⁷

IV. *Beyond the text: Folklore*

This does not mean that we should wholly exclude from the study of Marie's fables some considerations drawn from folklore and from the

⁷⁴ Runte, "Marie de France dans ses Fables," pp. 28–44.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷⁶ Fables 7, 11a, 13, 24, 26, 31, 32, 36, 40.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35. The examination of certain *epimythia* permits us to draw the same conclusion (p. 41).

grammar of stories in general. In many cases, this allows us to discern the profound structure of the fable, which can thus be seen to belong to an international family of narratives or stories.

In the Introduction to his edition of the *Fables*,⁷⁸ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht draws on the theory of Vladimir Propp⁷⁹ to distinguish the archetypes by classifying⁸⁰ the fables in accordance with antitheses such as "strong/weak" or "possessing/not possessing."⁸¹ In the former case, subdivisions can help to refine the classification. For example, Fable 2 ("The wolf and the lamb") comes under the rubric "exploitation of strength (despite a hypocritical justification)."⁸²

In his *Quellen*, Warnke declares that he does not know the source of some of the fables.⁸³ A structuralist analysis of the functions of the fable allows us to situate these in an oral tradition which has been identified through a comparison with international tales and narratives. In the Introduction to her translation of the *Fables*,⁸⁴ Mary Lou Martin gives examples, especially in the case of Fables 54 ("The peasant at prayer asking for a horse") and 64 ("The man, the horse, and the goat"). She finds structural and thematic similarities between Fable 54 and Folktale 1276 in the Aarne-Thompson Index;⁸⁵ the only difference is that in this tale, it is a woman who rows against the winds and storms.

It is indubitable that in certain cases the oral transmission explains the presence of themes both on the level of Marie's own text and on the level of texts which may have provided her with inspiration. To

⁷⁸ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Marie de France: Äsop* (Munich, 1973).

⁷⁹ In this context, see also Genette Ashby-Beach, "Les Fables de Marie de France: Essai de grammaire narrative," in *Cahiers d'Etudes médiévales: épopée animale, fable, fabliau*, (Publications de l'Université de Rouen) 83 (Paris, 1984), pp. 13–28.

⁸⁰ On this question, see M. Ellwood Smith, "A classification for fables," *Modern Philology* 15 (1917–18), 93–105. The author advocates a division into three great groups on the basis of the types of action that underlie Marie's Fables (pp. 98ff.). In particular, he shows us how certain fables of Marie (e.g. Fable 95, "The wicked woman and her husband") are remarkably similar to the fabliaux or, more precisely, to the "small fabliaux" (p. 103).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37ff.

⁸² The wolf replies: "I know the truth of it. Your father did the same thing to me at this spring six months ago when I was with him" (vv. 20–23).

⁸³ Karl Warnke, "Die Quellen des Esopes der Marie de France," in *Festgabe für H. Suchier* (Halle, 1900), pp. 161–264.

⁸⁴ Martin, *The Fables* (dissertation), p. 88.

⁸⁵ Antti Aarne, *The Types of Folktales*, trans. Stith Thompson, (Folklore Fellows Communications) 184 (Helsinki, 1961), p. 383.

grasp this point, it suffices to read Warnke's research into the sources of the *Fables*.⁸⁶

Research in this area can be facilitated by consulting the immense study of Haim Schwarzbaum.⁸⁷ Indexes such as Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*⁸⁸ and John E. Keller's *Motif-Index of Medieval Spanish Exempla*⁸⁹ relate Marie's *Fables* to international and intercultural folklore. Thanks to comparative tables,⁹⁰ the position of Marie de France between the *Romulus* and Berechiah is clearly demonstrated in the case of each of her fables.

Ultimately, folklore and literature intersect in the *Fables* of Marie, which show us the profound mental structures of the people who lived in the society of Henry II Plantagenet—structures based on an inheritance of beliefs and of cultures with a very varied origin.⁹¹

V. Conclusion: Tradition and renewal

The reason why Marie and her *Fables* met with such success both in her own days and subsequently is that she reworked the models she knew in order to give new breath to her characters and to make them complete individuals⁹² who do indeed live in a given social milieu but who nevertheless enjoy a certain psychological independence⁹³ that allows the reader to see their sensitivity, their emotions, and their complexity.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Warnke, "Quellen," pp. 161–264.

⁸⁷ Schwarzbaum, *The Mishle Shu'Alim* (see note 3).

⁸⁸ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols (Copenhagen, 1955–58).

⁸⁹ John E. Keller, *Motif-Index of Medieval Spanish Exempla* (Knoxville, 1949).

⁹⁰ For example, we see in Schwarzbaum, *The Mishle Shu'Alim*, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv, that Fable 4 of Marie corresponds to I, 3 of the *Romulus Nilantii* and to 2 of Berechiah. On p. 47, we see how the ferocity of the calumniators is highlighted in the *epimythion* of Berechiah: "a generation the teeth of which are as sharp as a sword." The table also indicates the relation of this fable to La Fontaine and to Thompson's *Motif-Index*.

⁹¹ On this point, see the reflections of Martin, *The Fables* (dissertation), p. 99.

⁹² See Hans Robert Jauss, *Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Tierdichtung* (Tübingen, 1959), p. 47.

⁹³ This may also be because Marie allows her woman's heart to speak. See Harriet Spiegel, "The Woman's Voice in the Fables of Marie de France," in Maréchal, *In Quest of Marie de France*, pp. 45–57.

⁹⁴ In the case of Fable 25 ("The woman who had her husband hanged"), Runte shows how Marie succeeds in emerging from the specifically didactic constraint to arrive at an unexpected moral reflection—at least, if we admit that the verses of the moral reflection are not necessarily meant to be taken at face value. See his "'Alfred's

Things will change in the fables written after Marie. In general, these are characterized by a fixed moralizing which employs a formulaic proverbial style.⁹⁵ The narrative itself is often weighed down with descriptive elements that slow down the main action.⁹⁶

This review of the fables written after Marie has been too brief, but we cannot omit one observation that is of capital importance. The *Isopet-Avionnet* has a tendency to give priority to a specifically human psychology⁹⁷ of the animal characters,⁹⁸ and this is merely the consequence of the excessive amplifications which make the reader lose sight of the social framework within which these characters are moving.⁹⁹

Frequently, and especially in the *Isopet-Avionnet*, the development¹⁰⁰ leads the fabulist in the direction of a religious moral reflection that aims to explain the distress that falls upon human beings and in a certain sense to offer them consolation by making them aware of a spiritual universe. Unlike these texts, the fable of Marie de France displays a didactic intention: she wants the subjects of the prince to submit resignedly to the laws of society, and at the same time she wants to limit the power of the ruler within the framework of equity and justice.¹⁰¹

Book,' Marie de France, and the Matron of Ephesus," *Romance Philology* 36.4 (1983), 556–71, at 562–63.

⁹⁵ Proverbs are not absent from Marie's *Fables*. See the study by Elisabeth Schulze-Busacker, "Proverbes et expressions proverbiales dans l'*Esope* de Marie de France," *Romania* 115 (1997), 1–21. Numerous similarities are identified, prompting the suggestion of a new date for the *Fables*, "shortly after 1180" (p. 21).

⁹⁶ This is the case with *Isopet* I ("The frogs who wanted to have a king"), which corresponds to Fable 18 of Marie de France. The comparison of the two moral reflections is instructive: that of Marie is concrete and is based on the narrative, while that of *Isopet* I does not get beyond proverbial generalities.

⁹⁷ Jeanne-Marie Boivin has shown convincingly that the *Isopets* are at the origin of the specifically French fable and that they prepared the way for the fable of La Fontaine. See her *Naissance de la fable en français: L'Isopet de Lyon et l'Isopet I-Avionnet* (Paris, 2006), pp. 400 and 413.

⁹⁸ Boivin emphasizes that the number of human characters constantly increases from the *Romulus* onwards (*Naissance*, p. 209). This may indeed be one of the reasons for the success of the *Avionnet*, where only 61 per cent of the fables have to do with animals.

⁹⁹ See my essay "Société et morale dans la fable ésopique du XII^e au XIV^e siècle," in *Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble: Hommage à Jean Dufournet*, ed. J.-C. Aubailly et al., 3 vols. (Paris, 1993), 1:281–322, esp. pp. 283–84.

¹⁰⁰ See Jeanne-Marie Boivin and Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Fables françaises du Moyen Âge* (Edition bilingue) (Paris, 1996).

¹⁰¹ See for example Fable 2, vv. 36ff. Equity judges "in accordance with the truth, not in accordance with the law," in the words of Nicholas Oresme, whose authority is the *Ethics* of Aristotle. He is quoted by Jeannine Quillet, "Un commentaire médiéval de la doctrine aristotélicienne de la justice: celui de Nicolas Oresme," in *La Justice au Moyen Âge (Sanction ou impunité?)* (Aix-en-Provence, 1986), pp. 283–91.

CHAPTER NINE

GENDERED SANCTITY IN MARIE DE FRANCE'S *L'ESPURGATOIRE SEINT PATRIZ* AND *LA VIE SEINTE AUDREE*

June Hall McCash

In an article published in 2002 in *Speculum*, “*La Vie seinte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?*” I made a case for including this hagiographical text on the life of Saint Audrey (or Etheldreda) within the corpus of Marie de France, concluding that it has “as much right to be considered among the works of Marie de France as the other three that scholars have attributed to her.”¹ That is not entirely true. Her *Ysopet* or collection of fables is, of course, the text from which we derive her name in the famous verses “Me numerai pur remembrance: / Marie ai nun, si sui de France” [“I’ll give my name, for memory: / I am from France, my name is Marie”] (Epilogue, vv. 3–4).² And as Richard Baum has reminded us, it is perhaps the only text that can be said with absolute certainty to have been written by this Marie who says she is from France.³ Having clarified that point, let me hasten to add that the *Vie seinte Audree* certainly has as much claim to have been written by this same woman as the other two texts attributed to her—the *Lais* and the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz*. I would argue, in fact, that it should have an even greater claim, given the similarity of the epilogues of the two works, which could only have been written by the same author or a blatant imitator who happened to have the same name and background, the same rhetorical training, the same attitude toward her writing, and the same determination to be remembered.⁴

¹ June Hall McCash, “*La Vie seinte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?*” *Speculum* 77 (2002), 744–77, here 776.

² *Fables*, ed. and trans. Harriet Spiegel (1987; Toronto, 1994). All quotations and translations are from this edition.

³ Richard Baum, *Recherches sur les œuvres attribuées à Marie de France* (Heidelberg, 1968).

⁴ For a more detailed comparison of these two epilogues, see McCash, “*La Vie seinte Audree*,” pp. 748–49. See also *The Life of Saint Audrey: A Text by Marie de France*, ed. and trans. June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban (Jefferson, NC, 2006), pp. 5–6. All quotations and translations are from this edition.

Indeed, she calls particular attention to that desire when she closes her epilogue to the *Audree* with an unrhymed verse ending with the word *remembre*: “Mut par est fol qui se oblie. / Ici escrit mon non Marie / Pur ce ke soie remembre” [One is indeed foolish who forgets herself: / here I write my name “Marie” / so that I may be remembered] (vv. 4623–25).⁵

It is evident beyond any doubt, in my view, that the woman who wrote the *Vie seinte Audree* also wrote the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz*, which most scholars accept without question to be a text by Marie de France. Within the article cited above and in a later conference paper presented in 2003, I began a preliminary comparison of these two texts based on a study of lexical, linguistic, stylistic, and intertextual data.⁶ In this present chapter, which will not waver from the assumption that they share a common author, I would like to expand that comparison to strengthen the argument that led me to such a conclusion, as well as to discuss why Marie would have chosen to culminate her career with these two particular works.

The woman we call Marie de France began her career by spurning the idea of translating Latin works into French, since so many others had already done it. Instead, as many scholars have pointed out, she set out to carve a new role for herself and to bring into the French vernacular Breton *lais* composed “pur remembrance.”⁷ By the time she began her *Ysopet*, however, she may already have softened her stance on Latin translation. Although her epilogue claims that she was translating from English into French, many scholars have identified her primary source for the first 40 fables as the Latin *Romulus Nilantii*.⁸

⁵ *Life of Saint Audrey*.

⁶ That paper, entitled “*L’Espurgatoire Seint Patriz* and *La Vie Seinte Audree*: A Stylistic Comparison,” was presented at the International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds, England, 14–17 July 2003. For this chapter I have also drawn on materials from papers presented at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2005, “*L’Espurgatoire seint Patriz* and *La Vie seinte Audree*: Gendered Sanctity,” and more recently at the New College Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Sarasota, Florida, 6–8 March 2008, “Spiritual Trials of Knight and Queen in Marie de France’s *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz* and *La Vie Seinte Audree*.”

⁷ Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. Alfred Ewert, intro. and bibl. Glyn S. Burgess (London, 1944; reissued London, 1995), v. 35. All references will be to this edition.

⁸ Marie writes that for love of Count William “M’entremis de cest livre feire / e de l’engleis en romanz treire” [“This volume was by me created, / From English to Romance translated”] (Epilogue, vv. 11–12). If indeed there was an English translation by “li reis Alvez” (presumably Alfred the Great, who was in fact noted for his translation skills), it is now lost. Thus, it is possible that she was translating either directly

Certainly by the time she began to translate religious works, she had embraced the notion of transposing Latin manuscripts into French for a new audience—a lay audience that had need of a first-hand understanding of the text in question. However, the fact that in her very first work she had already noted that she had considered the possibility of translating a “bone estoire” from Latin into French but had decided against it merely underscores the fact that she considered herself quite capable of such a task. Thus, it should not surprise readers that in her later life, she would have reconsidered. Other writers (e.g. Chrétien de Troyes) followed similar patterns, showing more interest in secular concerns early in life but increased interest in spiritual matters as they grew older. This same pattern is also typical of female cultural patrons, who tend to sponsor religious texts and institutions in their later life, even though they may not have done so as young women. Marie de Champagne is a case in point. Her early patronage fostered Arthurian romance and lyric poetry, while the last two works written for her, the *Eructavit* and a translation of the book of Genesis, both concerned spiritual matters.

In his recent book on Marie’s “poetics of memory,” Logan Whalen discusses the use of such rhetorical techniques as “*translatio studii* and *imperii*, *ordo*, *descriptio*, and *amplificatio*” in the *Espurgatoire* and the *Audree* and concludes that the author of both texts in question was clearly “an author accustomed to secular vernacular narrative, even though she is now working in the domain of hagiography.”⁹ He points out that the two texts exhibit a “common use of courtly language,”¹⁰ mentioning specifically the frequent use in both texts of such words as *merveille*, *s’emerveilla*, *esmerveilla*, and *merveilla* and noting that “[d]escriptions of the marvelous...represent a fundamental thematic element in courtly literature, as in the genres of romance and *lai*, for example.”¹¹ Marie even depicts Audrey’s escape from the pursuit of King Egfrid, her second husband, as a “merveilleuse aventure” (v. 1358). In fact, she uses the word *aventure*, another lexical element that appears frequently in courtly literature, 14 times in the *Audree*

from the Latin text or from a lost English translation. Sahar Amer has pointed as well to the possible influence of Arabic sources in her *Esope au féminin: Marie de France et la politique de l’interculturalité* (Amsterdam, 1994).

⁹ Logan E. Whalen, *Marie de France & The Poetics of Memory* (Washington, DC, 2008), p. 168.

¹⁰ Whalen, *Poetics of Memory*, p. 169.

¹¹ Whalen, *Poetics of Memory*, p. 154.

(vv. 123, 393, 460, 1358, 1574, 2011, 2115, 2502, 2743, 2905, 3158, 3817, 3932, 4108). Whalen also underscores and concurs with my earlier conclusion that her use of memory in the text suggests not so much the typical hagiographical “celebration of shared memory...of a saint whose life is already revered ‘en memoire’” as a *mise en memoire* that seeks to impress the memory of these *aventures* upon a new audience, as one might impress a seal in hot wax.¹² He goes on to point out that this is true as well for the *Espurgatoire*, noting that “a stylistic comparison of the narrations themselves in the two texts... reveals [their] shared concern with the application of *memoria* as it is expressed in the art of literary composition.”¹³ Memory is treated in both texts as an artistic duty, to preserve in memory important deeds, just as it is treated in secular romances and *lais*. In the *Espurgatoire*, Marie insists that:

Voil en romanz metre en escrit,
[.....]
en remembrance e en memoire,
des peines de l’Espurgatoire. (vv. 3, 5–6)¹⁴

[I want to put into French
[.....]
into remembrance and memory,
the sufferings of Purgatory.]

At the end of the text, she announces that she has accomplished her goal:

Jo(e), Marie, ai mis, en memoire,
le livre de l’Espurgatoire
en romance, k’il seit entendables
a laie genz e convenables. (vv. 2297–300)

[I, Marie, have translated
the book of Purgatory into French,
as a record, so that it might be understandable
and useful to lay people.]

Likewise, early in the *Vie seinte Audree*, she underscores the fact that preserving memory is an important duty:

¹² McCash, “Fourth Text?” p. 752. See Whalen, *Poetics of Memory*, pp. 167–68.

¹³ Whalen, *Poetics of Memory*, p. 167.

¹⁴ Marie de France, *L’Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*, ed. Yolande de Pontfarcy (Louvain, 1995). All references are to this edition. The translation is my own.

Digne chose est a remembrer
 La sainteté et recorder
 De la roïne sainte Audree
 Ke a Deu out s'amur donee. (vv. 1443–46)

[It is well worth remembering
 her righteousness and recalling
 how queen Saint Audrey
 had given her love to God.]

At the end of the work, she claims once again to have accomplished her task.

Issi ay ceo livre finé
 En romanz dit et translaté
 De la vie seintë Audree
 Si com en latin l'ay trové
 Et les miracles ay oï,
 Ne voil nul mettrë en obli. (vv. 4611–16)

[Now I have finished this book,
 told and translated into French
 the life of Saint Audrey
 just as I found it in Latin,
 along with the miracles I have heard.
 I do not wish to let anything be forgotten.]

Both translations into the vernacular are aimed at the edification of a lay audience, whom Marie refers to in the *Espurgatoire* as the “laie gent” (v. 2300) or “la simple gent” (v. 46) and alludes to in the *Audree* as the “bone gent del pais” (vv. 1424, 2926), who may not have been capable of reading the original Latin texts. She is, thus, recasting both texts for members of a new audience, whom she is encouraging to improve their lives. Again and again, in both texts, she uses the word *amender* (*Espurgatoire*, vv. 19, 46, 597, 2182; *Audree*, vv. 1114, 1204, 1494, 1671, 1907, 2835, 2928, 3849, 3952, 3964, 4045, 4159, 4524). In the *Espurgatoire*, the knight Owein emerges from Purgatory purified of his earlier wickedness by a combination of suffering and faith. Now his task is to amend his ways and spend his days in good and holy endeavors. In the *Vie seinte Audree*, the female protagonist, is good and virtually sinless from birth (“Nature bone l'enfanta” [“From Nature's womb, she was born good”], v. 1125). Although she is twice married, she remains a virgin by persuading her husbands to enter into a spiritual marriage. Finally she is able to found a double monastery, with herself as abbess, where she can live out the rest of her chaste life, loyal to God and the

bride of Christ in the ultimate spiritual marriage, inspiring others to amend their lives: “lur vies en amenderent” (v. 1204).

In order to receive heavenly rewards, which are briefly revealed to Owein and glimpsed once in the *Audree* text, not only must men and women amend their lives but also they must merit (*deservir*) celestial joy and give themselves to God’s service (*al Deu servise*). These words or phrases appear many times in both texts. In the *Audree*, some form of *deservir* occurs ten times (vv. 12, 15, 164, 355, 389, 1075, 1225, 1247, 1941, 2318); in the *Espurgatoire*, it appears nine times (vv. 262, 1053, 1067, 1184, 1525, 1667, 1525, 1667, 1778). “Al Deu servise” (or a slight variant) is repeated eight times in the *Espurgatoire* (vv. 497, 598, 769, 1556, 1930, 2187, 2226, 2296, and 19 times in the *Vie seinte Audree* (vv. 206, 250, 332, 488, 535, 618, 706, 765, 890, 900, 1122, 1206, 1224, 1664, 1692, 2354, 2444, 2784, 2792). On the other hand, the latter phrase, “al Deu servise,” never appears in Clemence of Barking’s *Vie de Sainte Catherine*, where we might expect similar language and concerns.

Another theme that Marie underscores in common between the two texts is that of suffering. Both protagonists embrace suffering as purification and a test of character. Owein *seeks* out the suffering of Purgatory to cleanse his life of his earlier brutal actions, and Audrey rejoices in the suffering of her final illness and ends her days in psalms, hymns, and prayer, in the faith “ke Deu flaele / Ceuz qu’il eime et ke il repele” [that God chastises / those whom He loves and calls to Himself] (vv. 1932–33).

The repetition of vocabulary throughout the two texts in question and the identical choices of rhyme that Marie sometimes makes in both texts are striking, suggesting a preference for a particular phraseology. I mentioned some of these in the earlier article but repeat them here for the benefit of readers who may not have seen the article in question and also because, in some cases, the verse numbers will differ.¹⁵

¹⁵ The article in *Speculum* was published four years before the appearance of the McCash-Barban edition of *The Life of Saint Audrey*, and verse numbers in that article are taken from the Södergård edition. The verse numbers in our volume differ because in one case Södergård omitted a manuscript line from his edition, and in other cases he failed to account for lines that the scribe had obviously omitted (e.g. lines for which there was no rhyme and for which the thought was incomplete). Thus, instead of 4,620 lines, the new edition contains 4,625 lines, the odd verse representing the unrhymed verse at the end of the text, which seems more than likely a deliberate effort on the part of the author to call attention to her determination to be *remembree* than a scribal

Cist jeta le païs d'errance (Audree, v. 80)	que jetté fuissent hors d'erance (Espurgatoire, v. 202)
Une nuit se geut et dormi. (Audree, v. 3485)	une nuit, entre le covent, si cum il jut e dut dormir. (Espurgatoire, vv. 2024–25)
Gariz est ki desert en vie La Deu grace e sa compaignie. (Audree, vv. 15–16)	pur la Deu grace deservir. (Espurgatoire, v. 262)
Pur sa beauté la coveitoient. (Audree, v. 272)	De sa beauté s'esmerveilla e en sun quer la coveita. (Espurgatoire, vv. 2231–32)
Si com nos trovom en escrit. (Audree, v. 1994)	si cum(e) nus trovum en escrit. (Espurgatoire, v. 504)
Fors a Deu servir et amer. (Audree, v. 1030)	kil volent amer e servir. (Espurgatoire, v. 212)
K'il n'out repos ne nuit ne jur. (Audree, v. 3244)	se defendit ke nuit ne jur. (Espurgatoire, v. 348)
Lors estoit en afflictions, En prières, en oreisons. (Audree, vv. 1761–62)	Nuit e jur fud en oreisuns, en veilles, en afflicciüns. (Espurgatoire, vv. 277–78)

These are but a few examples of the similar lexical choices and phrasing contained within the two works, and they could be multiplied many times. The words *jur et nuit* or *nuit et jur*, cliché though they may be, represent one of Marie's favorite phrases. She uses it repeatedly through all her works, three times in *Yonec*, twice in *Milun* and *Guigemar*, and eight times in the *Vie seinte Audree*.

The unlikely rhyme of "en oreisons" with "en afflictions" appears not just once in each of the two texts in question, but three times in the *Espurgatoire* (vv. 461–62; 277–78; 1909–10) and twice in the *Audree* (vv. 1761–62, 3381–82). As should be evident from the examples given above, Marie tends to reach for similar words and phrases in both texts in underscoring her ideas. Some version of the word *purpenser*, *purpensement*, *porpens*, etc. appears 14 times in the *Espurgatoire* (vv. 446, 453, 483, 554, 560, 646, 717, 719, 876, 962, 1680, 2114,

error. Östen Södergård, ed., *La Vie seinte Audree, poème anglo-normand du XIII^e siècle* (Uppsala, 1955).

2203, 2264) and ten times in the *Audree* (vv. 1, 965, 970, 976, 1056, 2572, 2684, 3254, 4383, 4523).

The most recent editor of the *Espurgatoire*, Yolande de Pontfarcy, calls attention in her edition to the fact that Marie's style is characterized by the repetition of phrases and sometimes of entire lines.¹⁶ Again, this statement applies to the *Audree* as well. For example, one of many such repetitions, she uses "Saint Bede qui le livre fist" three times, using only once the word *Et* in lieu of *Saint* (vv. 232, 484, 811). Phrases such as "estre delivre" and "en livre trové" occur repeatedly in the text. The author in both texts shows a clear preference for certain words, such as the older words *occire* and *oreison*, over the more recently coined *tuer* and *priere*. Both waver between demonstratives *icel* and *cel*, dependent upon the syllabic count of the verse: "En icel tems" but "En cel an" (*Espurgatoire*, vv. 1933 and 2071); "En icel tens" but "en cel tens" (*Audree*, vv. 91 and 97). In both texts she uses *devin* for *divin*, placing *e* for *i* in protonic position. (In fact, Marie de France uses this form in all her texts.) And both, in describing the mortals' glimpse of a heavenly vision, reach for similar phrases. In the *Audree*, we read "Dames [i] unt a grant plenté" (v. 3393), while in the *Espurgatoire* we find "Chascune aveit a grant plenté" (v. 1649). And in both, the narrator comments on the sweet *melodie* the observer could hear (*Audree*, v. 3395; *Espurgatoire*, v. 1657).

Linguistic evidence suggests that both texts were composed by a woman of continental origin living in England. Pontfarcy believes, as did H. Suchier, that the work's late 12th-century language, a mixture of Norman, Anglo-Norman, and Francien, indicates an author from "une region frontiere de la Normandie, qui par la suite, se serait installé en Angleterre."¹⁷ Östen Södergård, the first editor of the *Vie seinte Audree*, with absolutely no thought of seeking to demonstrate that the Marie of the *Audree* was the same author as that of the *Espurgatoire*, comes to a similar, though less specific, conclusion about the author of the *Audree*. After a thorough analysis of the linguistic and metrical characteristics of the text, he concludes that the *Audree* author, particularly in matters of versification, "se conforme aux habitudes du continent."¹⁸ However, his linguistic analysis reveals language traits

¹⁶ Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, "Introduction," p. 44.

¹⁷ Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, "Introduction," p. 38. See also H. Suchier, *Alzfranzösische Grammatik* (Halle, 1893), pp. 2 and 29.

¹⁸ Södergård, *Vie seinte Audree*, p. 38.

that also suggest a mixture of Norman, Anglo-Norman, and Francien dialects.¹⁹

The two manuscripts that contain these works (each found in only a single manuscript) both date from the late 13th or early 14th century, and both are of Anglo-Norman provenance. The manuscript that contains the *Espurgatoire* is currently deposited in Paris at the Bibliothèque nationale de France as BnF fr. 25407, having made its way to France as the consequence of a sale in the Netherlands. It once belonged to Louis XV and was a gift to him from the canons of Notre Dame in 1756.²⁰ It was, however, originally copied in an Anglo-Norman scriptorium, as Pontfarcy makes clear when she describes both its lines and ornamented initials as being “de type anglais.”²¹ The manuscript of the *Audree*, a collection of 13 metrical saints’ lives, including the only three known to have been written by women, is London, British Library, Additional 70513, and thus remains in England, where it too was copied. As Södergård has remarked without hesitation, “L’orthographe est anglo-normande.”²² Its original owner may have been Campsey Ash priory, founded in 1195 by Theobald de Valoines (or Theobald Valognes) for his two sisters, Joan and Agnes, said to be the “wealthiest house in East Anglia and one of the richest in all England.”²³ Certainly the priory owned it at one time. Eventually, however, the manuscript made its way, presumably after the priory disbanded in 1536, to the library of William Arthur, sixth duke of Welbeck.²⁴

¹⁹ It should be noted that medieval manuscripts are rarely dialectically pure, but such variations are particularly evident in manuscripts that have been copied in regions not necessarily native to the author.

²⁰ Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, “Introduction,” pp. 19–20.

²¹ Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, “Introduction,” p. 20.

²² Södergård, *Vie seinte Audree*, p. 37.

²³ Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695–1615* (University Park, PA, 2007), p. 197. See also Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350 to 1540* (Oxford, 1998), p. 41.

²⁴ McCash and Barban, *Life of Saint Audrey*, “Introduction,” p. 4. The manuscript has been studied in great detail by Delbert Russell, “The Campsey Collection of Old French Saints’ Lives: A Reexamination of its Structure and Provenance,” *Scriptorium* 57 (2003), 51–83; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture c. 1150–1300: Virginity and its Authorizations* (Oxford, 2001); and Simon Gaunt, “Saints, Sex, and Community: Hagiography,” in his *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge, 1995).

Although the two texts are preserved only in later manuscripts, both appear to have been composed within the last two decades of the 12th century, a time well within the possible parameters of Marie de France's career. Although the *Espurgatoire* could have been begun earlier, most critics contend that it was not completed prior to 1190, for it mentions Saint Malachy, who was canonized on 6 July 1190. However, in popular parlance the term *saint* was often used to refer to local holy figures long before formal canonization, and, in fact, in his edition of the *Espurgatoire* Michael J. Curley points to evidence "that Malachy achieved unofficial sainthood soon after his death," which occurred in 1148.²⁵ The source text of the *Espurgatoire*, the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* of H[enri] of Saltrey, exists in a short version and a long version. Critics differ on which came first, though the most reliable evidence suggests that the short version, dedicated to H[ugh], abbot of Sartis, who died in 1185, was the earliest.²⁶ Additions to the long text were provided by an Irish bishop Florentien, who told the monk of Saltrey that the entrance to Purgatory was within his diocese. He has been tentatively identified as Fógarthach Ua Cerbaláin (Florence or Fogarty O'Carolan c.1144–1230), who, according to Richard F. Cronnelly, became archbishop of Armagh in 1185, a post that would indeed have given him authority over the portion of Donegal that includes Station Island, where the cave entrance to Purgatory allegedly was located.²⁷ Certainly some version was known by Giraldus Cambrensis between 1187 and July 1189, for he refers to it in his

²⁵ Michael J. Curley, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory: A Poem by Marie de France* (Binghamton, NY, 1993), p. 8. Another case in point is Hildegard of Bingen who was often referred to as "Saint Hildegard" even though she was never formally canonized. In fact, she is listed as Saint Hildegard even in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

²⁶ For discussions of the dating of the *Tractatus*, see R. Easting, "The Date and Dedication of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*," *Speculum* 53 (1978), 778–81. For a thorough discussion of the dating of the *Espurgatoire*, see Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, "Introduction," pp. 4–10.

²⁷ See Richard F. Cronnelly, *Irish Family History*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1864), 1:38. Concerning the long and short versions of the *Tractatus* and the identification of Florentien, see H.E. Shields, "Légendes religieuses en ancien français, MS 951 de la Bibl. de Trinity College à Dublin," *Scriptorium* 34.1 (1980), 59–71. See also Curley, *Purgatory*, p. 10; and Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, p. 259, note for v. 2075. According to Curley, O'Carolan became bishop of Tír Eogain, which he cites as Derry, in this year. According to Pontfarcy, the bishop of Tír Eogain refers to the bishop of Tyrone. The names are not really inconsistent. Even today the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical province of Armagh has jurisdiction over all or portions of several counties, among them Derry, Donegal, and Tyrone. The bishop mentioned in the text claimed to know Saint Malachy, who was himself bishop of Armagh. Although he would have been but a

second version of the *Topographia*.²⁸ Although Marie's text relies more closely on the short version, it also contains elements from the long version, including the information that comes from Bishop Florentien, and could thus have been composed only after 1185. It is likely that it was completed before the turn of the century, during the period of the source text's greatest popularity.

The source text for the *Vie sainte Audree* was available somewhat earlier than that for the *Espurgatoire*. It was evidently based on manuscripts that were also available to the compiler of the *Liber Eliensis*, who made his compilation between 1131–74.²⁹ Rupert T. Pickens has identified Marie's actual sources as three separate works—the *Vita* of Saint Etheldreda, *De secunda translatione*, and a collection of *Miracula* closely related to a manuscript he calls *Douai-B* (BL Cotton Domitian A xv).³⁰ Thus, the *Audree* could have been written either before or after the *Espurgatoire*, though it seems likely that both texts were written sometime in the last two decades of the 12th century.

In both cases the translator is remarkably faithful to the original Latin text, yet departs from it in precisely the same way and in similar phrasing. Södergård comments on the great stylistic difference between the Latin source text and Marie's *Audree*: "Thomas d'Ely écrivait une langue lourde, diffuse et prolixe. Marie, par contre, utilisa le texte latin avec une grande liberté et en retint les éléments qui étaient concrets, narratifs et parfois dramatiques. Le style de Marie ne s'attache donc pas servilement au canevas latin."³¹ There is no question that Marie seems less interested in certain parts of the *Vie sainte Audree* than others. Nevertheless, faithful to her source text, she plods through its four generations of Audree's family, giving us in less than exciting detail the historical background of Britain and East Anglia. But when she is able to focus on a single character, a single story line, she is at her best, and we see the Marie of her earlier works shining through. Lucien

child at the saint's death, he could perhaps claim familiarity with him and his legacy through their common bishopric.

²⁸ See Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, "Introduction," p. 8.

²⁹ On the dating of the *Liber Eliensis*, see E.O. Blake, *Liber Eliensis* (London, 1962), "Introduction," pp. xlv–xlix.

³⁰ On this manuscript and the dating of the text, see Rupert T. Pickens's chapter "Marie de France *Translatrix* II: *La Vie sainte Audree*" in this volume. See also McCash and Barban, *Life of Saint Audree*, p. 8.

³¹ Södergård, *Vie sainte Audree*, p. 36. See also Pickens's chapter in this volume for some of the ways in which Marie departs from her source.

Foulet has made a similar observation concerning the *Espurgatoire*: "C'est seulement en arrivant à la narration d'Owein qu'elle se sent sur un terrain solide: là son style s'affermi... elle est cette fois dans son élément. On peut donc dire que ce n'est pas la théologie qui l'a attirée à l'œuvre d'Henri de Saltrey."³² It is the human story in both texts that seems to attract Marie, and in both the *Espurgatoire* and the *Vie sainte Audree*, despite her relative fidelity to her sources, she injects her own liveliness and her own sense of drama.

In both texts she appropriates the narrative voice, acknowledging her original source only by referring to it as "li livre" or "l'escrit," but never identifying the author by name. In Pontfarcy's words, "[e]lle présente son œuvre et assume le rôle de narratrice."³³ She blends her own narration so completely with that of the source author that she treats the original author's sources, Bede, Augustine (*Aüstin* in both texts), and Gregory the Great as her own. Foulet agrees and finds her stance as translator/narrator of the *Espurgatoire* particularly noteworthy precisely because of this assumption of the first-person narrative role, in which she essentially replaces the monk de Saltrey as narrator to take on the role herself, to the benefit of the text, he believes. The Latin text, he tells us, "est assez souvent empétré, obscure: mais il ne manque guère de se clarifier en passant dans les limpides octosyllabes de Marie."³⁴ Though he is writing of her translation of the *Espurgatoire*, his observations apply equally well to the *Vie sainte Audree*.

Among other characteristics of Marie's personal style in the *Audree* are those described by Pontfarcy as typical of the *Espurgatoire*: her "position très personnelle à l'égard de la traduction"; her "souci d'originalité" and "soif d'estime"; and her presence in the text, not only in her introductions and conclusions but also in her occasional personal comments and interjections in the first person.³⁵ Marie often uses the plural in both texts, for example "Ceo nus trovums," placing herself among her readers rather than above them, though again, in both, she also makes comments in the first-person singular. She intrudes in both works in precisely the same manner to remind us of her presence, and there is no question that she is speaking in her own

³² Lucien Foulet, "Marie de France et la Légende du Purgatoire de Saint Patrice," *Romanische Forschungen* 22 (1908), 599–627, here 625.

³³ Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, "Introduction," p. 40.

³⁴ Foulet "Marie de France," p. 622.

³⁵ Pontfarcy, *Espurgatoire*, "Introduction," pp. 38–45, esp. p. 39.

first-person singular or plural, with much-repeated phrases such as "Si com nos trovom en escrit" (*Audree*, v. 1994), a phrase she also uses in one form or another repeatedly in the *Espurgatoire* (e.g. v. 504).

In each of the two texts in question, the author takes pains to try to convince the reader of the truth of her tale based on narrative and empirical evidence, since there are those who might doubt that a living man descended into Purgatory or that a woman, twice married, remained a virgin throughout her life. In the *Tractatus*, Curley notes that in the Latin source of the *Espurgatoire*, H[enry] of Saltrey bases the proof of his text on authority, using the writings of Augustine and Gregory to "validate the narrative account of Owein's experience," but that Marie, in her translation, does quite the opposite, reversing "the epistemological order of the *Tractatus*"³⁶ and using Owein's experience, followed by the narratives of brother Gilbert, Florentien, and the unnamed chaplain, to confirm the theology of souls in the patristic writings.³⁷ In the Latin source for the *Audree* text, however, the monk of Ely does precisely what Marie seems to prefer, and she appropriates his proof. He is careful to give his stories "literary authority" by providing their narrative context, a technique that seems to appeal to Marie, and she reiterates in her text not only the well-known story of the Virgin Mary and her husband Joseph but also the narrative of the shepherd Eucalist and his wife, Marie. She retells this story with virtually all its earthy details intact, in fact adding to the foot-washing of Eucalist's two guests a hand-washing as well. She describes, as her source had done, the sackcloth Eucalist and his wife sleep in at night and their story as satisfactory evidence that marriage and virginity, even among those of the lower classes, are not by definition incompatible. Thus, the stories of both Audree and Owein, as they come down to us from Marie de France, rely on narrative rather than theology to prove their veracity. The last miracle we see of Audree's sanctity (a flashback in the text) is her overcoming her first husband's wrath as she casts her gloves before him and they remain suspended in a ray of sunlight. Tonbert, recognizing her gesture and the suspended gloves as a miracle, abandons his anger to beg instead for mercy and forgiveness, which she grants "Ducement par humilité" [Sweetly and humbly]

³⁶ Curley, *Purgatory*, p. 25.

³⁷ In an interesting reversal, the tale ends not with a devil tormenting a man but, instead, with the tormenting of a devil who has failed in his mission to corrupt a priest.

(v. 4591). An unnamed but skeptical monk reads of the miracle but goes to bed not believing it. In her final gesture in the text, the saint herself comes to the monk in the night and convinces him of its truth. Thus, the final anecdotes of both texts concern disbelief and the need to convince unbelievers of the truth of the tale they have just heard, and in both texts eyewitness accounts close the work: those of Gilbert and Florentien in the *Espurgatoire*, and that of the skeptical monk in the *Audree*.

Any student of medieval literature accustomed to finding a humility topos, particularly in the work of the few women authors whose work we know, and even in the work of many male authors, will look in vain for such a topos in Marie's work. Unlike the Nun of Barking, who asks forgiveness for her "presumptiun" as a woman for having translated the life of Edward the Confessor, such thoughts never seem to cross Marie's mind, as she proudly signs her works and takes credit for her accomplishments. Even H[enry] of Saltrey, the male author of the *Tractatus*, the Latin source of the *Espurgatoire*, describes himself as "brother H. the least of the monks of Saltrey" (*frater .H. monachorum [de Saltereia] minimus*).³⁸ By the same token, the author of the Latin source of the *Vie seinte Audree*, often referred to as Thomas of Ely but, according to E.O. Blake, more probably Richard of Ely, appeals to the reader not to find fault with "the meagreness of my style and the prolixity of my treatment" (*parvitatem scribendi et prolixitatem tractandi*).³⁹ We find no such apologies in either of the texts by Marie, nor in any of her other works. This refusal to denigrate her talents is one of the most salient points in her works. In fact, she begins her *Lais* by pointing out that anyone to whom God has given knowledge and "bon' eloquence" (v. 2), presumably like herself, has no right to remain silent or to cover up her talents. She never backs away from this statement in any of her works.

³⁸ The edition of Pontfarcy conveniently provides a *version courte* of the *Tractatus*. For this citation, see her edition of *Espurgatoire*, p. 74.

³⁹ I take the English quotations from the recent translation of Janet Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely From the Seventh Century to the Twelfth* (Woodbridge, England, 2005), p. 1. The Latin comes from Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, p. 1. At other places in the text as well the Latin author calls attention to the inadequacy of his vocabulary and oral capabilities. Although, as Pickens has pointed out, the *Liber Eliensis* was apparently not Marie's source, this portion of the text is virtually identical to that of the *Douai-B*, which he has identified as a version of her source manuscript. For a differing opinion concerning the source text and an explanation of how Marie may have had access to Ely manuscripts, see Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 180–83.

In the end, why should we conclude that the same woman wrote both of these texts? It is highly unlikely, in fact virtually inconceivable, that, despite the frequency of the name Marie in the late 12th century that there could be two women writers of the same name with such remarkably similar styles, approaches, concerns, and actual phrasing working at approximately the same time. Given all the evidence, I do not see how we can draw any conclusion other than the fact that the two texts were written by the same woman. Was the person who wrote these two texts the same Marie de France who wrote the *Fables* and the *Lais*? I am convinced that she was, though demonstrating the linguistic, stylistic, and intertextual relationships between the two works in question and Marie's two secular works is not the purpose of this chapter. Critics seem already convinced that the woman who calls herself Marie and indicates that she is "de France" is the same woman who wrote the *Espurgatoire*, and, as I have sought to demonstrate, there can be little reason to doubt that the same woman who wrote the *Espurgatoire* also wrote the *Vie seinte Audree*, which has an even clearer connection to the *Fables* by virtue of their similar epilogues. In the interest of space, I will cite only three verses, though there are many other similarities of phrasing and concern in these two epilogues. In the *Fables*, she states:

Cil fet que fol ki sei ublie (*Fables*, epilogue, 8)
 Me numerai pur remembrance
 Marie ai nun, si sui de France. (*Fables*, epilogue, 3-4)

In the *Vie seinte Audree*, she echoes these lines:

Mut par est fol ki se oblie
 Ici escriis mon non Marie,
 Pur ce ke soie remembree. (*Audree*, 4618-20)

In these few lines, the author accomplishes precisely the same thing: she notes the foolishness of forgetting to name oneself; she names herself; and she explains why she is naming herself. She wants to be remembered.

The question remains, why would she choose to write these two religious texts that were so different from her earlier *Lais* and *Fables*? Where the *Lais* and *Fables* appear in multiple manuscripts, either in part or in toto, the *Espurgatoire* and the *Vie seinte Audree* are each found, as noted above, in only one extant manuscript. The later works were obviously not copied with the frequency of the *Lais* and the *Fables*, which is not surprising considering the more serious subject

matter and the less hidden didactic content. They did not lend themselves as readily, as did the *Fables* and the *Lais*, to oral readings after large meals in the great hall. Nor do they so consistently display the narrative power of the first two works. Thus why did she choose to write them?

In her prologue to the *Espurgatoire*, Marie tells us specifically that she has undertaken that work at the request of an unidentified nobleman (a “prosdom,” *Espurgatoire*, v. 9) who had for a long time (“peça”) sought to persuade her to do so. The “beau piere” whom she directly addresses in verse 16, where the translation actually begins, is a transposition of H[enri] of Saltrey’s “pater uenerande,” and not a reference to the “prosdom” she refers to earlier. As I read the text, verse 16 marks the actual beginning of the translation, whereas verses 1–15 are Marie’s own. Thus, it is for the nobleman mentioned in the prologue that she finally decided to take on the task:

Uns prosdom m’ad peça requise;
pur ço m’en suis ore entremise,
de mettre mei en cel labor,
pur reverence et pur s’onor. (vv. 9–12)

[A nobleman had for a long time requested (it) of me;
For this reason, I have now undertaken
To set myself to this work,
Out of respect and for his honor.]

Although she never identifies him by name, she does strongly suggest that he is her patron.

E si lui plect e il le voille
—k’en ses bienfaiz tuz jurs m’acoille—
dirai ço ke j(o)’en ai oï. (vv. 12–14)

[And if it pleases him and he wishes to do so,
—may he always bestow his favors upon me—
I will tell what I have heard.]

Whoever he was and whatever their relationship may have been, his request was clearly the catalyst for her work. But the fact that he had requested the work “for a long time” (*peça*) suggests that there may have been at the outset still some resistance on her part to undertaking such a translation. Her hesitation may not have been so much a lingering reluctance to translate from Latin to French as a reluctance to undertake a lengthy religious text so different from her other works. For this reason, if for no other, it seems to me likely that the

Espurgatoire was the first to be translated of the two texts, so close together in time and whose sources were composed in such geographical proximity—one at the Cistercian monastery in Saltrey (called Sawtry today) and one at the Benedictine monastery in Ely, both within modern Cambridgeshire and less than 25 miles apart.

In the *Vie sainte Audree*, that reluctance has obviously vanished. It is the only one of the four texts that she begins without a patron in mind, that she undertakes entirely of her own volition. Gone is any mention of the “nobles reis” of the *Lais*, the “cunte Willame” of the *Fables*, or the unnamed “prosdom” who requested the *Espurgatoire*. This time, as Marie explains at the beginning of the text, she has undertaken the task only to honor Saint Audree: “Pour sainte Audree la roïne, / [Li] cui bien ne faut ne decline, / Hay comencé ce livre a faire” [I have undertaken to write this book / in honor of Saint Audrey the queen / whose goodness has never faded nor diminished] (vv. 29–31). It is the first text she has written for a woman. The successful completion of one such translation, *L'Espurgatoire*, may well have led to the writing of the second text, one that was perhaps closer to her heart and a matter of greater personal choice. Or it may have appealed to her for another reason—that of gender balance. It certainly suggests that the life of Saint Audrey appealed to her particularly as a female writer.

Despite their obvious differences in subject matter, there is enough similarity between the two texts to see why they would be of interest to the same person. Both are religious texts, one attributed to a Cistercian (H[enri] of Saltry), the other to a Benedictine (Thomas or Richard of Ely).⁴⁰ Both are, in a sense, religious quests, one by a man, the other by a woman, in which suffering is a means, perhaps the only one, of purifying the soul, and salvation comes only through faith. Both contain characters who must choose between the life of the laity and the monastic life and thus reflect within a courtly context decisions that must be confronted by men and women of the noble class.

It is not surprising that the first known French woman poet, Marie de France, would, in some respect, focus on gender questions in her works. Certainly she does so in her earliest two texts. Her collection

⁴⁰ The text on which the *Audree* is based, at least that portion that is the *vita*, is frequently attributed to Thomas of Ely. In his edition of the *Liber Elienses*, which contains that *vita*, Blake suggests that the author of the text (on which this portion of both the *Liber Elienses* and the *Douai-B* are based) is more likely Richard of Ely. See Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, pp. xlv–xlix. The compilers of both versions are unknown.

of *lais*, believed to be her first literary effort, largely explores the sufferings of love and how they affect women in particular. However, Ernest Hoepffner quite rightly described two of her *lais*, *Lanval* and *Yonec*, as “les deux ailes d’un diptyque,” contending that they “traitent au fond le même sujet, vu sous deux faces différentes.”⁴¹ In these two *lais*, Marie depicts the expectations, trials, and restraints imposed by courtly society from dual perspectives—that of the male protagonist in *Lanval* and that of the female protagonist in *Yonec*. Stated briefly, the young knight, Lanval, has a duty to prove himself in a foreign court—that of King Arthur. He seems to have the requisite knightly skills and attributes: nobility (he is a king’s son), valor, prowess, generosity, and good looks; however, he has not found favor at court and has been overlooked by the king in his distribution of lands and wives. We encounter Lanval near the beginning of the tale, riding away from court, dejected, in need of redemption.

In the *lai* of *Yonec*, the unnamed *dame* of the tale also seems to have all the necessary qualities of a young noblewoman: she is described as wise, courtly, beautiful, and of high birth. Against her will, however, she has been compelled to marry a possessive but rich old man, who wants her only to bear him children and who keeps her locked in a tower. She too is unhappy and dejected as she lies enclosed in her guarded bedchamber at the outset of the narrative, and, like Lanval, she is in need of redemption. Their plights must have been quite common for young men and women of the noble class.

Redemption for each comes in the form of an Otherworld lover who meets all needs, a fairy lover in the case of Lanval, who provides wealth and sexual satisfaction. To the lady in *Yonec*, the redeemer is a shape-changing hawk, an *autour* who becomes a handsome knight, giving the lady the love she craves and fathering the child she so desperately needs. In both cases, the gender-based problems imposed by society’s demands are addressed and their desires granted, thanks to Otherworld intervention. Marie points out the different expectations imposed on the two genders, while at the same time underscoring the commonality of their need.

In the *Fables*, Marie, the only known female fabulist, according to Harriet Spiegel, “from classical times through the eighteenth century,”

⁴¹ *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1935), p. 72.

once again quite pointedly raises gender issues.⁴² While she clearly differentiates gender roles, both confirming and challenging the male hierarchy of authority, she depicts females in the fables who are often more individualized, frequently clever, compassionate, and nurturing—though not always. She begins her work with the tale of a cock pecking at a pile of manure for his nourishment and ends with the fable of a hen scratching in the dirt on a similar mission. The author uses both fables to show that men and women can be alike in their foolishness.⁴³ The cock finds a gemstone, whose value he recognizes, but he prefers the food he derives from dung. Marie makes it clear that she is speaking of both genders when she writes:

Cum del cok e de la gemme,
 Veü l'avums de humme e de femme:
 Bien de honur mut poi present;
 Le pis pernent, le meuz despisent. (vv. 19–22)

[What for the cock and gem is true
 We've seen with men and women too:
 They neither good nor honour prize;
 The worst they seize; the best, despise.]

Sandra Hindman has noted that the cock and the gemstone is a common initial fable in many earlier collections; however, Marie's closing with the fable of the hen is quite unique.⁴⁴ It serves both to remind the reader of the opening fable, which challenges the reader to seek out the gem, and also reminds us for a second time that males and females alike share a preference to seek sustenance in filth, rather than to accept a better way. In the fable of the hen, Marie underscores the foolish decisions people make simply because it is their nature to be foolish. The hen's owner, presumably a peasant woman but one who, in the illuminations of at least two manuscripts, wears precisely (and

⁴² Harriet Spiegel, the first scholar to study gender issues in the *Fables*, points out that in Marie's hands "the conventional and conventionally male fable form becomes not only a way to question the male hierarchy but also a way to explore the gender roles inherent in this order" ("The Male Animal in the Fables of Marie de France," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees [Minneapolis, 1994], p. 111).

⁴³ Sandra Hindman points out that Marie is the first fabulist recounting the fable of the cock to specify "both men and women in the accompanying moral" ("Æsop's Cock and Marie's Hen: Gendered Authorship in Text and Image in Manuscripts of Marie de France's Fables," in *Women and the Book Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor [Toronto, 1996], p. 48).

⁴⁴ Hindman, "Æsop's Cock," p. 37.

probably not coincidentally) the same garments as Marie de France in the corresponding author portraits, offers to provide a full measure of grain to the hen each day, which would free her perhaps to devote herself to a higher endeavor. The hen refuses, indicating that she would still scratch in the dirt “Sulunc ma nature, sulunc mun us” [Such is my nature and my way] (v. 20). Clearly Marie does not limit this foolishness to women but includes “plusurs gens” [many people] (v. 22) who cannot or will not change their habits, but “Tuz jurs coveitent en lur curage” [The(y) lust within, for all their days] (v. 26). Marie sees foolishness and baseness as a part of human nature, and, reiterating a version of that phrase “selunc nature” in both fables, she is careful to include both genders in her gentle rebuke.

Throughout her career Marie seems eager to represent both male and female perspectives, although admittedly she privileges the female, whose nature seems better able, she seems to suggest in such characters as Fresne and Guildelüec, to act according to the principle of inclusiveness. In the *Lais*, she introduces the problem of love and its exclusiveness through a male character, Guigemar, only to find a resolution of that problem through the selfless inclusiveness and God-centered actions of a female character, Guildelüec.⁴⁵

It is not surprising, therefore, that questions of gender should arise in her last two works—*L’Espurgatoire seint Patriz* and *La Vie seinte Audree*, which may, I think, be considered spiritual companion pieces. Nor is it surprising that she would seek in her two final texts to present a balance of spiritual choices that begins with the male Owein, who remains a knight, and ends with the female Audree, who becomes a nun. Here, as in the two *lais* mentioned above, gender and societal expectation have influenced the two protagonists’ lives and choices, and in both the characters must deal with the questions of suffering and salvation.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ For a discussion of this issue and the frame *lais* of *Guigemar* and *Eliduc* (*Guildelüec ha Gualadun*), see June Hall McCash, “The Curse of the White Hind and the Cure of the Weasel: Animal Magic in the Lais of Marie de France,” in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 199–209.

⁴⁶ Blanton has also noted that, if Marie de France wrote both texts (and she claims to be persuaded by my arguments), then the *Audree* “fits within the larger *corpus* in which Marie comments directly on the social expectations of aristocratic life, even as it provides a hagiographical narrative for women that complements the male-centered *Espurgatoire*” (*Signs of Devotion*, p. 180).

Owein, a nobleman typical of his social class, has become a knight—a profession that by definition involves warfare and killing. He is thus burdened with sin at the outset of the text and seeks to expiate his sins by undergoing a test of both courage and faith. Repenting his past acts, he comes before his bishop to make confession: “kar mult aveit sovent ovré / contre Deu en grant cruelté” [For he had very often worked / against God with great cruelty] (vv. 513–14). As his penance he seeks to enter Saint Patrick’s Purgatory: “ke jo seie de mes pechiez / e delivres e espurgiez” [“so that I may be purged / and saved from my sins”] (vv. 539–40).

As background information, Marie tells us that in a vision of Christ, Saint Patrick has been given a copy of the Gospels and a “bastun Deu” [staff of God] (v. 296) to use when he preaches in order to help him convert the Irish.⁴⁷ God then led him to a deserted place and showed him there “une fosse tute roünde; / si ert dedenz grant e parfunde” [a round pit: inside it was large and deep] (vv. 306–07), which contained the entrance to Purgatory. The adventure connected to the site was to descend into the gaping hole, to spend an entire day and night, and then to return, cleansed of sin, or else to remain there, “periz e perduz” [perished and lost] (v. 428), never to be seen again. It will be a veritable spiritual *aventure* (v. 499), as Marie describes it, in which he meets and overcomes in immortal combat adversaries in the form of devils, torture, and temptations. The adventure, as Curley suggests in his edition of the work, is reminiscent of Arthurian tales, where a knight must undergo trials of valor and courage.⁴⁸

The bishop discourages him from the journey, warning him that many who enter Purgatory do not return and urging instead that he become a monk or at least a canon to accomplish his purpose. But Owein, who seems to recognize that he has no vocation in the Church, is adamantly opposed, though at this point in the text he leaves open the option to change his mind after he undergoes his trial:

Il lui respunt ke nun fera:
ja autre habit n'en recevra,

⁴⁷ Pontfarcy notes that the copy of the Gospels referred to here corresponds to the Book of Armagh, which contains the New Testament as well as hagiographical texts, and that the “bastun Deu” is an allusion to the pastoral crozier of St Patrick, both insignias of the bishop of Armagh. See her edition of *Espurgatoire*, p. 101, note to vv. 287–98. See also R. Easting, *St Patrick’s Purgatory* (Oxford, 1991), p. 196.

⁴⁸ Curley, *Purgatory*, pp. 33–34.

fors tel cume l'aveit eü
de ci k'il ait cel liu veü. (vv. 555–58)

[He replied that he would not do it:
he would receive no other habit
than the one he had worn
until he had seen this place (Purgatory).]

Realizing that he cannot change the mind of Owein, who is determined to endure “la plus grieve penitence” [the heaviest penance] (v. 536), the bishop sends him to the prior, instructing him to receive the knight and allow him to enter Purgatory.

The prior has him undergo a ritualistic preparation, praying, fasting, and keeping a 15-day vigil. Then, after mass, he blesses Owein, sprinkles him with holy water, and marches with him in a “bele processiun” to the mouth of the cave. There the prior begs him one more time to reconsider, arguing in much the same way as the bishop:

“Amis, certes, si tu creeies
nos conseilz, ja n'i entereis.
Bien poz ci ta vie amender,
e Deu servir e honurer.
Mult i sunt entreé e perdu,
ne sout hom k'il sunt devenu.” (vv. 595–600)

[“Friend, surely, if you believe
our advice, you would never enter there.
You can amend your life here,
and serve and honor God.
Many have entered and been lost there
and no one knows what became of them.”]⁴⁹

But again he cannot change the knight's mind, for he is determined to undertake this spiritual quest in search of penitence and forgiveness, an *aventure* intended to earn him salvation. The prior gives him final instructions on what to expect and allows Owein to enter the cave.

Purgatory is so black that Owein cannot see but must depend on an “autre clarte” [another light] (v. 678). Greeted first by messengers from God who tell him in greater detail the trials he is about to undergo, he

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that Marie also uses this word *amender* in the prologue to her *Fables*, noting that: “Par moralité escriveient / Les bons proverbes qu'il oieient, / Que cil amender se peüssent / Ki lur entente en bien eüssent” [The sayings which they heard, they wrote, / So that the morals we would note; Thus those who wish to mend their ways / Can think about what wisdom says] (vv. 7–10).

is cautioned to call on the name of Jesus for protection. As a knight, Owein is usually armed with a sword and accustomed to going into battle boldly to conquer men. Now he must go forth to conquer the worst of all adversaries—the devil—armed, as we are told, with “[d]es armes Deu” [the armor of God] (v. 797): with the hauberk of justice, the shield of faith, the helmet of firm belief, and the sword of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰ Confronted with one torment, trial, and threat after another, with creatures too horrible to look at and people tortured and begging for mercy, Owein remembers to call on the name of Jesus in each of his ten torments, which delivers him from his anguish. Finally, nearing the end, he reaches a perilous bridge that stretches across a burning sulfurous river, reminiscent of the sword bridge in the *Lancelot*, for it is extremely narrow, slippery, and very high. But once again, when he calls on the name of Jesus, the bridge begins to widen so that two carts could have passed each other, and he crosses without difficulty to emerge victorious in an earthly paradise (though he is allowed only a glimpse of the heavenly paradise), sanctified from his *aventure*.

Upon his return from Purgatory, Owein undertakes another quest, this time as a crusader in the Holy Land: “En honur (de) Deu sun Creatur / croiser se fist par grant amour” [He took the cross with great love/ and honor for God his creator] (vv. 1913–14). Upon his return he must make a final decision about his future and asks the advice, not of a clergyman this time, but of the king, as to whether he should become a monk or not. The king of the Latin source provides no reply, leaving an open question, but Marie’s version supplies the king “with a ready answer.”⁵¹ He advises Owein to remain a knight and serve God in the secular world. Although Owein had recognized the “greignur gloire” [greater glory] (v. 1968) of monks, he does not wish to change his station and chooses once and for all the advice of the king: “en non de chevalier morra, / ja autre abit n’en recevra” [as a knight he will die; / he will never take any other habit] (vv. 1976–77). Owein’s choice leads him back into the world, wiser perhaps, but still obedient primarily to his king. His last act is that of serving as interpreter, at the behest of the king of Ireland, to one Gilbert, who comes to Ireland to

⁵⁰ For the ultimate source of God’s armor, see St Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, 6:11–17.

⁵¹ Curley, *Purgatory*, p. 23.

establish an abbey but is handicapped by not knowing the language. Like Marie herself, he agrees to serve as translator for God's glory.

Audree, in contrast, faces different and fewer choices than Owein. As a man in Marie's world he can choose to be a knight, a husband, a crusader, a monk, or a canon. A 7th-century woman like Audree, who also lives in Marie's literary world, seems to have but two choices: she will be a wife or she will be a nun. Just as the *Espurgatoire saint Patriz* draws on the vocabulary and ideas of courtly literature, so does the *Vie sainte Audree*. Audree is described much as a courtly lady of romance. When she is first introduced in verse 229 as "La beneïte virge Audree" [the blessed virgin Audrey], we are reminded from the outset that she is a saint, but the description that follows has a more secular tone, reminiscent of that of *Fresne*, for "De tote gent estoit amee / Et mut preisee et mut dotee" [She was greatly loved, admired / and revered by everyone] (vv. 239–40). *Fresne* is described by Marie at almost exactly the same moment in the text "Nul ne la vist que ne l'amast / E a merveille la preïast" [No one saw her without loving her and admiring her greatly] (vv. 241–42). The beauty of Audree is legendary, and her suitors are many. Like the *pucelle* in *Deus amanz*, news of the lady's beauty and virtue spread far and wide, and many suitors came to seek her love:

De sa bieué et de sa valur
Parloient mut li plusur,
Et loinz et pres [en] fu portee
La novele et la renomee.
Roi et prince la demandeient,
Pur sa beauté la coveitoient
Et pur la grant valur de ly
Ke chascuns en avot oï. (vv. 267–74)

[People spoke at length
about her beauty and her worth.
News of her and her reputation
had spread both far and near.
Kings and princes asked for her hand:
they desired her because of her beauty
and also because each had heard
of her worthy comportment.]

However, the problem for Audree is not a possessive father who places obstacles in the way of her marriage, as it is for the *pucelle* of *Deus amanz*, but rather a father who is all too eager to marry her off, in spite of the fact that her heart belongs to her beloved "Jesu Crist, / A

ki virginité promist" [Jesus Christ, / to whom she promised her virginity] (vv. 277–78). But because of her beauty she has many wealthy suitors. Her father finally gives her to Tonbert, prince of Gyrvi, who repeatedly begs for her hand in marriage. Technically, in Anglo-Saxon society, she must give consent to the marriage. Marie tells us of her initial reaction:

Come sainte Audree l'oÿ
Mut se dolut et mut fremi,
E contredist a son pooir
Pur ceo k'ele voleit manoir
En la vie qu'ele out enprise
Et qu'ele avoit a Deu promise. (vv. 291–96)

[When Saint Audrey heard of it (her upcoming marriage),
she moaned, trembled all over,
and protested as best she could,
for she wanted to continue to live
the life she had undertaken
and promised to God.]

In the end, however, she acquiesces to "l'auctorité de son pere, / De ses parents et de sa mere" [the authority of her father, / her relatives, and her mother] (vv. 299–300) and consents to marry Tonbert. Thus, even that one choice she technically has as a woman is not really a choice but, rather, a coercion. Nonetheless, she accepts marriage against her will in obedience to her father. But from her husband, Tonbert, she extracts an agreement for a spiritual marriage, and they live together chastely: "Un cors, un cuer, et un talent / Heurent cist espiritement" [The couple was spiritually united: / one in heart, body, and desire] (vv. 361–62). When Tonbert dies three years after their marriage, although she expresses appropriate outward signs of grief, Audree rejoices inwardly, "Ky doit la virge estre delivre, / Toz jurs sanz mariage vivre" [The virgin believed she was now free / to live forever without marriage] (vv. 373–74). Such, however, will not be the case. Even though her father is now dead, she is still a sought-after princess and a handy marriage pawn. Other relatives persuade her to marry once more, another coercion she finally agrees to: "Prist la virge ceo marriage, / Sanz volenté de son curage" [without the consent of her heart, / the virgin accepted this marriage] (vv. 802–03).

Audree, however, proves once again to be a strong woman and, like Owein, not driven easily from the path she has undertaken. As such, she serves as a model for other women living in secular society.

This time her husband-to-be is Egfrid of York, the powerful king of Northumbria. He too at first agrees to a spiritual marriage (in fact, he was but a boy at the time of the marriage), and they lead what Marie describes as a "Seinte vie et bele" [holy and beautiful life] (v. 872). They have harmonious relations with their bishop, Saint Wolfrid, and their lands benefit from "Pais et joie e plenté de bien" [peace and joy / and...abundance] (v. 879). Over time, however, Egfrid, who tries at first to win his queen with sweetness and love (v. 925), becomes impatient that he can conquer neither her heart nor her body:

Unkes ne pot estre entamee
 En cors ne en quer violee,
 Unkes ne vout pur son seignur
 Par priere ne par amour
 Lessier k'el ne fust en servise
 Jhesu Crist ou ele s'ert mise. (vv. 943–48)

[Never would her body be penetrated
 nor her heart violated.
 Never for her lord Egfrid's
 beseeching nor for his love
 did she want to leave the service
 of Jesus Christ to which she had committed herself.]

Egfrid becomes irritated and angry. When he cannot seduce her with love and sweetness, he tries force, but again is unsuccessful. Finally he appeals to Bishop Wolfrid, promising him rich rewards if he will persuade Queen Audree:

Qu'ele lessast son vou ester
 De sa virginité garder,
 Rendist a lui ce qu'el devoit
 Si come espouse a espous doit. (vv. 1015–18)

[to let go of her vow
 to keep her virginity,
 and to give him what she ought,
 as was her wifely duty.]

Finally Audree, with the help of Wolfrid and after much begging and anguish, persuades her husband to allow her to enter a convent. She enters the convent at Coldingham, where Egfrid's aunt Ebba is abbess. Now for the first time, the text states, she truly feels like a queen, as she begins to serve God as she had always wanted. It is not long, however, before Egfrid changes his mind and sets out to bring her back. In an effort to escape his grasp and with the help of divine Providence and

the encouragement of Ebba, Audree takes refuge on the island of Ely, which had been a part of her dower from her first husband. This section of the text, as Audree flees for safety with Egfrid in hot pursuit, is one of the most dramatic parts of the work. She crosses the eel-filled marshes with two female companions, Sewar and Oswen, with the king not far behind, determined to take her "Par droite force" [by direct force] (v. 1321). The three women climb to the top of a hill, and God causes the sea to rise and surround the hill. The king waits for a week, unable to cross the wide waters until finally, in frustration and anger, he returns home, where he takes out his rage on Archbishop Wolfrid, removes him from office, and sends him away. He then marries another woman.

In gratitude for God's help, Audree founds a double monastery at Ely, where she lives out the rest of her life as a virgin abbess—essentially her only recourse other than marriage. Although Audree does not have the heaped-up sins for which Owein must find redemption in Purgatory, she nonetheless also embraces suffering—as a blessing from God to help her expiate her youthful sins. When a growth around her neck causes her much pain and ultimately brings about her death, she thanks God for her suffering:

A deu rendi grace et merci
De la dolor qu'ele sueffri.
Ele entendi ke Deu flaele
Ceuz k'il aime e ke il repele. (vv. 1929–32)

[She even gave thanks and praise to God
for the pain she suffered.
She knew that God chastises
those whom He loves and calls to Himself.]

She had brought the suffering on herself, she believes, for the delight she once took in wearing a gold necklace. And "par cel mal [ele] espeni / Le suerfait et la vanité / De l'or qu'elë avait porté" [through her pain she expiated / the excess and vanity / over the gold she had worn] (vv. 1948–50). Although the nuns send for a physician who lances the swelling to let out the humor filling it, she will die three days later from the wound. She spends her final days joyfully singing hymns and psalms and praying to God, and upon her death she is buried in a simple wooden coffin.

Sixteen years later, her sister Sexborc, now abbess, decides to have her body translated and moved into a stone sarcophagus inside the church. When her grave is opened, they discover Audree's body

uncorrupted, with the wound from the incision having healed: "Si entier et en tel semblant / Come d'une femme dormant" [completely whole, resembling / a woman sleeping] (vv. 2240–41).

Despite the many similarities between the *Espurgatoire* and the *Vie seinte Audree*, the common goal of salvation of Owein and Audrey, and even their determined efforts to reach their goal on their own terms, the two works differ significantly in narrative and character portrayals as a consequence of their protagonists' genders. Although they share a goal of salvation, their means of seeking it are sharply contrasted. Both are counseled by lay person and cleric alike. While Owein ultimately chooses to follow the advice of his king, Audree chooses the counsel (and support) of her bishop. His is a true choice, one that he considers more than once, and he chooses the secular life. Audree's choices, in contrast, as we have seen, are severely restricted by her gender. As a virtuous woman of her time, she is characterized by obedience to her father, her family, and God. She has but one desire: to serve God. When familial authorities pressure her to marry, Audree, as an intelligent woman, believes that she has found a way through spiritual marriage to balance her commitment to God and to her earthly and dynastic duty. However, spiritual marriage is, by definition, a contract between man and woman. It can be valid only if both parties agree. For a time Audree finds the concurrence she seeks in her two husbands; however, as soon as her second husband, Egfrid, withdraws his approval and desires to consummate the marriage, the situation changes. Thanks only to a series of miracles from God, she is able to evade his capture.

In short, Audree has no real choice that is hers alone to make. To achieve her sanctity and retain her virginity, and with her bishop's support, she abandons the secular world for the safety of the convent. Her choice of monastic enclosure reflects a common concept of female space in the Middle Ages. As the lady in *Yonec* learns when she tries to pursue her dying lover, open spaces are hostile to women. Only closed spaces—domestic space within marriage or holy space with the convent—seem permitted to them.

By the time Marie wrote the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz* and the *Vie seinte Audree*, her attitudes had clearly shifted from the secular concerns evident in the *Lais* to more spiritual concerns—a pattern not unusual for medieval women, as I have suggested above. Even so, her spiritual works appear to be directed primarily toward a secular audience, one not likely to have understood the Latin source text but

which could understand Marie's translation.⁵² They suggest a courtly, lay audience (an intent clearly stated in the case of the *Espurgatoire*, written for "laie gent") though only hinted at in the *Vie seinte Audree*. The Campsey manuscript indicates that the *Audree* was also read to nuns at mealtimes and, in all probability, to the laywomen who were frequent guests at Campsey Ash Priory.⁵³ Virginia Blanton notes that "the priory was a meeting ground for women: nuns, lay women, and vowesses."⁵⁴ At one point she describes it as "a boarding house for aristocratic women, both lay and religious."⁵⁵ Certainly the text was suitable for any audience of women who must face or who had already faced the same limited options as Audree. And Marie's choice of this particular text to translate seems to provide a deliberate contrast with the *Espurgatoire*.

Which text was written first is impossible to say (though I am inclined to think that the requested *Espurgatoire* was probably first), but having written one, it is not surprising that she elected to complete what we might call her sanctity cycle with the other. In both works Marie demonstrates one's ability to serve God in either the secular or monastic life. In the *Espurgatoire*, Owein's choice of the secular life underscores the fact that, even as a knight, he can remain faithful to God. He emerges from Purgatory purified of his earlier wickedness by a combination of suffering and faith. Now his task is to improve his ways and spend his days in good and holy endeavors. In the *Vie seinte Audree*, Audree is pure and good from the beginning, but, if she chooses to remain a virgin, the enclosure of monastic life, which she finally achieves only after trying to maintain her virginity in secular

⁵² Marie de France has often been described by critics as a nun. In a recent article, I argued against that probability. As a laywoman she would very likely have visited convents and had considerable knowledge of monastic life, and marriage or celibacy (i.e. monastic life) was no doubt a choice she had to make in her own life. No convincing evidence suggests that she was a nun, and a great deal of evidence seems to point to her lay status. For my arguments on this matter, see "Was Marie de France a Nun?" *Le Cygne: Journal of the International Marie de France Society* 4, n.s. (2006), 7–26.

⁵³ An inscription on folio 265v states that "ce livre deveiseie a la priorie de kanpseye de lire a mengier" [this book was designated at Campsey Priory for reading at mealtime]. The word "deveiseie" is ambiguous. Concerning its possible meanings, see Russell, "Campsey Collection," pp. 63–64.

⁵⁴ Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 196.

⁵⁵ Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 179. Blanton also argues that the *Audree* is "crafted specially to induce aristocratic patronage by women who had the means to imitate Æthelthryth's governance of her wealth and the social position to adopt the authority that underscores acts of religious patronage" (p. 174).

life through a spiritual marriage, is clearly shown to be the best and surest path for a medieval woman. While, as the *Vie seinte Audree* reveals, with monumental effort *and* spousal cooperation a woman can maintain sanctity and virginity in married life, it is only in monastic life that these can be guaranteed.

There is no question that the essential plots of these two tales are the creation of Marie's source texts. But in many ways she has made them her own: the language and emphases of both and the choice of the latter text, which contrasts so perfectly with the former, are hers. And it is precisely in her choices—both lexical and thematic—that the fruitfulness of the comparison of gendered sanctity lies. Throughout her works, Marie has not painted a one-sided world depicted only through the eyes and problems of women. On the contrary hers is a balanced presentation that looks at issues from both sides. She is critical yet realistic about her world, revealing in her works the limited choices and societal pressures of noble life. These last two works, written late in her career, represent her final efforts to examine the paths that the world allows in the quest for God from both a male and a female point of view, illustrating the obstacles, the choices one must make between the secular and the spiritual, and finally the rewards of seeking God and prevailing over the world's temptations. They are, I believe, her last attempt to examine the trials and temptations one must overcome to reconcile the courtly world with religious fervor. She shows the reader that, whatever choices life may seem to offer men and women, in the end, their only meaningful choice is whether or not they will serve God and achieve salvation.

CHAPTER TEN

MARIE DE FRANCE *TRANSLATRIX* II: *LA VIE SEINTE AUDREE*

Rupert T. Pickens

Over the years, a handful of scholars have flirted with implications that Marie de France, to whom we attribute the collections of *Fables* and *Lais* in London, British Library, Harley 978, and the *Espurgatoire saint Patriz*, may also have been the translator of the *Vie sainte Audree* found in the famous Campsey MS, BL, Add. 70513, fols 100v–134v.¹ More recently, June Hall McCash has argued cogently and convincingly in favor of Marie's authorship of the *Audree*.² All four works appear to have been composed in the last third of the 12th century by a writer from the Ile-de-France residing in England, and all four are signed by a woman named Marie. They are all translations, or purport to be so, and they embody a poetics of *translatio*.³

¹ With varying degrees of conviction, Richard Baum, *Recherches sur les œuvres attribuées à Marie de France* (Heidelberg, 1968), p. 196; Emanuel Mickel, Jr., *Marie de France* (New York, 1974), pp. 143–44; and Michael J. Curley, trans., *St Patrick's Purgatory: A Poem by Marie de France* (Binghamton, NY, 1993), p. 7. On the Campsey MS, see Delbert Russell, "The Campsey Collection of Old French Saints' Lives: A Reexamination of Its Structure and Provenance," *Scriptorium* 57 (2003), 51–83; and MARGOT, Electronic Campsey Project, University of Waterloo, http://margot.uwaterloo.ca/campsey/cmphome_e.html.

² June Hall McCash, "La Vie sainte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?" *Speculum* 77 (2002), 744–77; her chapter in this book, "Gendered Sanctity in Marie de France's *L'Espurgatoire saint Patriz* and *La Vie sainte Audree*"; June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban, ed. and trans., *The Life of Saint Audree: A Text by Marie de France* (Jefferson, NC, and London, 2006), pp. 5–8; and see Mickel, "Foreword," in McCash and Barban, pp. 1–2. Subsequently, Logan E. Whalen, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (Washington, DC, 2008), pp. 137–73; Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695–1615* (University Park, PA, 2007), pp. 173–82; Carla Rossi Bellotto, "La Vie sainte Audree: un nuovo tassello per ricostruire l'identità di Maria di Francia?" *Critica e Testo* 9 (2006), 871–86, and "Marie, ki en sun tens pas ne s'oblie": *Maria di Francia, la storia oltre l'enigma* (Rome, 2007); and Rupert T. Pickens, "En bien parler and mesparler: Fecundity and Sterility in the Works of Marie de France," *Le Cygne* 3 n.s. (2005), 7–22.

³ For example, Michelle A. Freeman, "Marie de France's Poetics of Silence: Implications for a Feminine *Translatio*," *PMLA* 99 (1984), 860–83; Bonnie Hermann Leonard, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Translation* (Diss., University of Pennsylvania,

This chapter discusses the Latin source of the *Audree* and how Marie translates it.⁴ It focuses primarily on one section of Marie's exemplar, its collection of miracles, brief narratives not unlike fables and *lais*, and explores some of its salient features, implicitly suggesting why it may have attracted a writer like Marie de France. Finally, it demonstrates how Marie takes possession of her exemplar and makes its text her own.

I. Marie's exemplar

Marie's Latin source, a text very close to that in a late 13th- or early 14th-century MS, BL, Cotton Domitian A xv, fols 9va-75ra (=Cotton),⁵ has much in common with the *Liber Eliensis* [*Book of Ely*] (=LE).⁶ They are both profoundly concerned with St Audrey (also Æthelthryth or Etheldreda), queen of Northumbria, who in 673 founded at Ely a double Benedictine monastery ruled by abbesses. Pillaged by Danes in 869, the abbey was reformed as a male house under King Edgar (ruled 959-75). In 1109 Hervey le Breton was named bishop of the new Diocese of Ely, carved out of the vast Diocese of Lincoln, and the abbey church became its cathedral. Both Marie's exemplar and LE were compiled at Ely in the 12th century and served its community of monks,

1993); and Rupert T. Pickens, "Translation and *Translatio* in the *Vie seinte Audree*," paper presented at the 40th International Medieval Congress, University of Western Michigan, May 5-8, 2005.

⁴ The text used throughout is McCash and Barban, *Life of Saint Audrey*; translations are my own.

⁵ Östen Södergård, ed., *La Vie seinte Audree* (Uppsala, 1955), pp. 33-37, recognizes that Marie's translation abbreviates a text close to the Latin *Life* of St Audrey edited by Daniel Papebroch (1628-1714), *De S. Etheldreda Regina, Virgine, Abbatissa Elyensi in Anglia*, in *Acta sanctorum*, June IV (Venice, 1743), cols 489-576, based on early modern copies of Cotton (Papebroch, col. 489a-c). Except for rubrics, which I have transcribed directly from Cotton, the Latin text used throughout is Papebroch's (=AS); translations are my own. For contents of Cotton compared with *Audree*, see McCash and Barban, *Life of Saint Audrey*, pp. 262-70. Marie does not translate the history and geography of Ely or Bede's accounts of St Audrey (fols 1-9r), which may not have introduced her exemplar.

⁶ E.O. Blake, ed., *Liber Eliensis* (London, 1962). Blake assigns to Cotton the siglum B. Janet Fairweather, trans., *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY, 2005), emends Blake's text (pp. xxv-xxvii). On affinities between Cotton and LE, see Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, pp. xxvii, xxxv-xxxvii, and discussion below; also Rosalind C. Love, ed. and trans., *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Lives of the Female Saints of Ely* (Oxford, 2004), pp. lxvii-lxviii.

but they also circulated beyond the abbey's walls.⁷ Both books preserve more or less intact, though in different orders and arrangements, the *Vita sancte virginis et regine Etheldrede* [*The Life of the Holy Virgin and Queen Audrey*], a tract on the second translation of Ely's women saints (Audrey, her sisters Sexburga and Wihthurga, and niece Ermenhilda), and a number of St Audrey's miracles and texts related to them. One may have served partially as a source for the other, but it is far more likely that they drew independently on the same store of texts, preserved singly, in dossiers, or as booklets, in the library at Ely.⁸

The first part of Marie's exemplar, the *Vita*, is virtually identical with *LE*, Book 1. The second part, *De secunda translatione* [*On the Second Translation*], resembles only the last ten of 150 chapters of *LE*, Book 2.⁹ The last part, the *Miracula* [*Miracles*],¹⁰ differs radically from anything in *LE*. It is a collection of 53 miracles introduced by a prologue recalling another miracle found in the *Vita*. Thirty-six of the miracles recur in *LE*, but scattered throughout Books 2 and 3. The prologue and 17 other miracles, well over one-third of the 53, are absent in *LE*. Meanwhile, *LE* preserves six miracles not found in Cotton or Marie's translation.¹¹

Both books were probably completed in the 1170s or shortly thereafter. *LE* was compiled perhaps earlier in the decade, following the

⁷ Blanton, *Signs*, p. 182, suggests that Marie may have visited the Ely library or borrowed her exemplar from it, offering evidence in support of the latter. On related manuscripts, see esp. Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, pp. xxiii–xxvii, Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis: A History*, pp. xxv–xxviii, and Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Lives of the Female Saints of Ely*, pp. xlviii–lvii.

⁸ Identical or nearly identical strings of miracles found in both Cotton and *LE* suggest the existence of smaller collections of miracles and/or dossiers used by compilers of both books. Nine are definitely recognizable in the *Miracula*: (1) nos 4–5/*LE* 3:§§119–20, (2) nos 6–10/*LE* 2:§§129–33, (3) nos 12–16, 45/*LE* 3:§§27 (prologue not in Cotton)–36 [*LE* 3:§§27, 29–32 not in Cotton], (4) nos 17–18/*LE* 3:§§42–43, (5) nos 21, 26–29/*LE* 3:§§57–61, (6) nos 30–31/*LE* 3:§§130–31, (7) nos 32–33/*LE* 3:§§137–38, (8) nos 35–36/*LE* 3:§§93–94, (9) nos 37–39/*LE* 3:§§116–18. The absence or rearrangement of miracles in Cotton suggests deliberate intervention. Among the miracles in Cotton only, two strings are identifiable by internal connections: (1) nos 42–43 (linked verbally), and (2) nos 46–49 (unique mixtures of prose and hexameters).

⁹ *LE* 2:§§118, 140–48, 150. As throughout, Marie's translation conforms with Cotton. *Secunda translatione* circulated separately as a *libellum* (Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis: A History*, p. 275n).

¹⁰ Often called the *Liber miraculorum* [*Book of Miracles*]. See Appendix, nos 1–2, incipit, and n. 49.

¹¹ *LE*, Book 3:§§29–31, 121–22, 132. In addition, Cotton and *LE* share 13 miracles found in the *Vita*: *LE* 1:§§23, 27–31, 39, 41–46; *AS* 1:§§61–62, 66–71, 85–86, 89–95; *Audree* vv. 2055–154, 2213–334, 2429–52, 2461–646.

death of Bishop Nigel in 1169 and the events in 1170–73 that inspired the *Passio sanctissimi Thomas martyris*... [*Passion of the Most Holy Martyr, Thomas*...] (3:§143) that concludes it. *LE* is silent on the episcopacy of Nigel's successor, Geoffrey Ridel (1174–89), so it must have been compiled during the last years the see lay vacant (1169–74). Marie's exemplar cannot have been completed before 1174, however, for Bishop Ridel is mentioned in no. 52. As only three miracles at most can be associated with Ridel's episcopacy, while many more are devoted to the other bishops,¹² Marie's exemplar may have been compiled not long after 1174.

II. *The Miracula*

Because of material they do not share, fundamental differences that distinguish *LE* and Marie's exemplar absolutely emerge in a comparison of the *Miracula* with *LE*, Books 2 and 3. Both aspire to a high style rich in classically inspired vocabulary, syntax, allusion, imitation, and verse, qualities that Marie de France would have recognized and no doubt appreciated. But the *Miracula* is a generally coherent work of literary art despite the fact that different components came from a variety of sources and genres. The collection functions to celebrate and to inspire belief in the powers of St Audrey and in the love and benevolence she bestows upon those who are faithful to her. *LE* has another purpose. Books 2 and 3 constitute a cartulary, a pragmatically designed archive compiled to preserve documents and to assert the rights and privileges due Ely Cathedral and its monastery.¹³

The *Vita* alone has the fundamental shape of a saint's life: prologue, genealogy, life, translation, 11 miracles, and epilogue.¹⁴ The structure is disturbed only occasionally by the introduction of extraneous matter. A significant fact about Marie's exemplar is that the saint's-life structure informs its entirety: prologue, *Life* with genealogy, translation, and early miracles, that is, the *Vita*; second translation; miracles down

¹² Hervey le Breton: as many as nine (nos 12–19, 45); Nigel: 27 (nos 21–39, 42–44, 46–50).

¹³ See Virginia Blanton-Whetsell, "Tota integra, tota incorrupta: The Shrine of St Æthelthryth as Symbol of Monastic Autonomy," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32 (2002), 227–67; and Blanton, *Signs*, pp. 131–71.

¹⁴ Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, p. xxx.

to the 1170s more than five times the number of the earlier ones; and epilogue (arguably Miracle 53). Marie's exemplar is a "super-saint's life." In *LE*, by contrast, the second translation is important primarily as the crowning event in the period from 970 to 1107 covered by Book 2, but it is overshadowed by cartulary information and historical matter only indirectly related to St Audrey. Nine miracles and the miraculous content of *Secunda translatione* account at most for 18 or so of 150 chapters in *LE*, Book 2. Meanwhile, in *LE*, Book 3, only 31 of 143 chapters preserve miracles. Subordination of miracles to cartulary and historical material to such degrees relegates the miracles to the status of assets like land grants and other gifts and privileges.

For these reasons, it seems doubtful that Marie de France would have been interested in reading *LE*, except for the *Vita*, much less in translating most of it. Her exemplar, by contrast, privileges St Audrey's compelling biography and accounts for her presence in the world after her death. As a super-saint's life, it is also a coherent work artistically conceived and executed. Of particular interest to us and, I believe, to Marie is the *Miracula* itself, which features the miracle, the *miraculum*, both as a discrete narrative like a *lai* or a fable and as a member of a collection. As in her other collections, Marie is concerned with individual, gem-like narratives and with assembling the parts into coherent wholes like a jeweled brooch or the reliquary described in *Laiüstic*. She is also interested in other techniques of *assemblage* such as grouping and pairing. In addition, many miracles are themselves extraordinarily dramatic and passionate texts that manifest a high degree of artistic self-consciousness in powerful, purposeful writing.

In this context, it is pertinent to discuss two aspects of *assemblage* that shape Marie's exemplar in general and the *Miracula* in particular: *dispositio*, or layout, and the midpoint. *LE*, an archive based in history, organizes its material chronologically, but Cotton, which is virtually unencumbered by cartulary matter,¹⁵ is not necessarily bound by chronological ordering. Events in 27, or just over half, of the *Miracula* can in fact be dated from internal references (see *tituli* in the Appendix):

¹⁵ Nos 2–3, on King Edgar's restoration of the abbey and his grants of privileges; however, all subsequent miracles necessarily proceed from his actions.

<i>No. of miracle</i>	<i>Basis for dating</i>	<i>Year(s) specified</i>
2	King Edgar's reign	959–75
3	King Edgar's reign	959–75
4	After King Edgar's death	975 or later
5	After King Edgar's death	975 or later
6	Abbotcy of Simeon	1080–93
8	Death of Picot, sheriff of Cambridge	1086
9	Death of Sheriff Picot's successor	1086 or later
10	Abbotcy of Simeon	1080–93
11	Death of William of Warenne	1088
12	Year given in text	1111
13	The 16th year of Henry I's reign	1116
14	Following events in no. 13	1116 or later
15	Year implicit ¹⁶	1116
20	Vacancy of the abbotcy at Ely (not in <i>LE</i>)	1093–1100
21	Date given in text	6 June 1135
25	Nigel's episcopacy	1133–69
32	Three years or so before Nigel's death	c.1166 ¹⁷
33	Nigel's death, date given	1169
35	Nigel's episcopacy	1133–69
36	Ording prior of St Edmund's	1138 or later
40	King Edgar's reign, Brithnod's abbotcy	970–75
41	King Edgar's reign, Brithnod's abbotcy	970–75
42	Nigel's episcopacy (not in <i>LE</i>)	1133–69
43	Nigel's episcopacy, King Stephen's reign (not in <i>LE</i>)	1135–54
45	Hervey le Breton's episcopacy	1107–33
50	Year given in text, Nigel named	1154
52	Geoffrey Ridel's episcopacy, Henry II's reign (not in <i>LE</i>)	1174–89

The cartulary-like *LE* respects chronology.¹⁸ So does the *Miracula* generally, but six miracles occur out of order and thus call attention to themselves: nos 20, 32–33, 40–41, and 45. All are found in the section devoted to Nigel's episcopacy. No. 20 introduces the section, while

¹⁶ Papebroch's calculation (AS, col. 550f, n).

¹⁷ No. 32 gives conflicting information (3:§112): Nigel died in the 36th year of his episcopacy, which began in 1133 (thus the correct 1169), and during the 17th year of the Young King Henry (born 1155) (thus 1172).

¹⁸ In *LE*, only nos 4–5 violate established chronology. See Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis: A History*, p. 455n.

nos 32–33, about Nigel's final illness and death, anticipate its end, which is not definitely marked before no. 50.

The presence or absence of chronological development implies an opposition of two forms of narrative organization: natural and artificial order.¹⁹ Medieval arts of poetry generally discuss such matters in terms of how to begin—whether one opens with the first of a series of events presented chronologically (natural order), in the middle of the series (one kind of artificial order), or at the end (another kind of artificial order). With Virgil's *Aeneid*, which begins *in medias res*, as the standard model, artificial order is considered the more elegant. As Geoffroi de Vinsauf remarks, “Civilius ordine recto / Et longe prior, quamvis praeposterus ordo” [More cultivated than straight (i.e. natural) order, and preferable by far, is order with as much inversion as possible].²⁰ Clearly, as a matter of *dispositio*, the choice of natural or artificial order at the opening has bearing on the development of the work as a whole. More importantly, however, even an initial choice of natural order does not necessarily preclude eventual chronological disruptions.

Except for the *Vita*, Cotton and *LE* are not prolonged narratives, but their arrangement—their *assemblage*—remains an important matter. In the more pragmatic *LE*, documents are classified in a practical natural order, starting at the beginning of Ely history and continuing to the death of Bishop Nigel. Without natural order, chaos would render *LE* useless. As a work that is neither a cartulary nor a chronicle, the *Miracula*, a collection of brief narratives, is also laid out in natural order, but the accounts of Nigel's episcopacy are organized artificially and therefore artfully: (1) no. 20 initiates a process of *praeposterus ordo* by jumping back to the end of the 11th century, while (2) nos 32–33 spring forward to the end of Nigel's life; (3) nos 40–41 hark back to the reign of King Edgar in the third quarter of the 10th century; and (4) no. 45 recalls the episcopacy (1107–33) of Nigel's predecessor. The arrangement proves to be meaningful, for it constitutes an accusatory commentary directed against Nigel that is strengthened by thematic links with other miracles in the section.

¹⁹ See Douglas Kelly, *The Art of Medieval Romance* (Madison, WI, 1992), pp. 269–72.

²⁰ Geoffroi de Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, lines 99–100, in Edmond Faral, ed., *Les Arts poétiques du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle* (1924; repr. Paris, 1971), p. 200, my translation.

No. 20 opens the sequence by evoking another chaotic period in Ely's history, when the abbacy lay vacant. After the death of Simeon in 1093, monks who came with him from Winchester rob the monastery of riches and relics and take flight. In Guildford their plunder is destroyed when their lodgings catch fire and burn after they overindulge in food and drink. They are severely punished by their superiors in Winchester. The miracle makes two relevant points. First, St Audrey always takes revenge on those who abuse and defile her property. Second, outsiders (*estranei, externi*) always bring disaster to Ely. The miracle continues to circulate in fact "ut discant posteri semper fieri detrimentum bonorum, in administratione externorum" [so that future monks may learn that damage to good men is always done under the rule of outsiders] (3:§71). This miracle appropriately introduces the Nigel sequence, for he is both a plunderer of St Audrey's property and a powerful outsider—a former treasurer of Henry I, nephew of the bishop of Salisbury, and vigorous opponent of King Stephen, Ely's royal patron.

Indeed, in the second instance of artificial ordering, nos 32–33, which forecast the end of the period, portray Nigel as an exemplary looter who is punished with suffering, like Simeon's unruly charges, and eventually death. In no. 32, Nigel is seriously ill when a woman in the monks' care has a vision of St Wihtburga with an iron mace bashing unrepentant offenders who have wronged her sister Audrey. At Wihtburga's behest, the woman conveys her vision to Nigel via a monk named Austin. The bishop is astounded and confesses to mismanagement of the cathedral's affairs, but he is stricken with a crippling disease shortly afterwards and suffers for three years before dying. He spends the rest of his days in constant prayer and supplication, "sed neque sic conversus est, ut bene faceret Jacob & domui Juda" [but he did not change to such a degree that he brought prosperity to Jacob and the house of Judah (i.e. the people of God)] (3:§112). No. 33 names many clerics and laymen, including Nigel and his henchmen, who have committed offenses against St Audrey and her church. All have been justly struck down in vengeance. The miracle proleptically concludes with an account of further outrages committed by Nigel's son Richard, who insinuates himself into the good graces of Henry II by slandering St Audrey's monks.

Among the criminals mentioned in no. 33 are Henricus Peregrinus (3:§114)—Henry the Foreigner or Outsider—who appears earlier (no. 25), and a certain Constable Adam, who returns subsequently (no. 42).

It is in no. 25 that Nigel's corruption is first displayed through his irresponsible neglect of his charges. The writer suggests in his self-conscious exordium that he makes an original contribution by including this "rem...gestam" [epic tale] (3:§88) among St Audrey's miracles, for indeed this is the second longest miracle in the collection, and he continues:

Tunc quippe Elyensis ecclesia, sub honesto Pastore honeste conversans, diabolica invidia carere non potuit, quin inter reliqua Regni infortunia, quæ jam undique crebuerant, & ipsa partem tribulationis haberet. Nam & ab invidis & malignis quibusdam, qui res Monachorum, Monachis a sua potestate dejectis, dispensare cupiebant, crudelis parabatur delatio. (3:§88)

[At that time, indeed, living virtuously under a virtuous shepherd, the church at Ely could not suffer from devilish hostility, but how could it avoid having its share of turmoil among the kingdom's other misfortunes, which were already increasing all around? For a cruel setback was being prepared by certain hostile and evil monks who, after the bishop cast them out from under his authority, sought to dispense with the monastic life.]

An ironic intent becomes clear in light of subsequent events. The church's "shepherd" is far from "virtuous," and "casting out" the evil, non-observant monks from under his authority means that he unleashed them to wreak havoc in the church. Irony is underscored by the fact that Nigel is never named, while in *LE* (3:§47–50), his identity is repeatedly made explicit.

The leader of the renegade monks is Nigel's steward, one Ranulphus of Glastonbury. He is an ignoble "nostri temporis Catalina" [Cataline of our times] (3:§89) who for two years, supposedly unbeknownst to the bishop, tyrannizes the monks and pillages the church with two cohorts, the infamous Henricus Peregrinus and one Radulphus Burgundio.²¹ In the end, their excesses are such that even Radulphus, conscience-stricken, seeks refuge at St Audrey's tomb and confesses his sins. Meanwhile, his collaborators, who take flight with their plunder, are captured, thanks to divine intervention, tried, and condemned to exile.

²¹ "...ex ipsius cognominis interpretatione,...cum infidi sint Allobroges, & ipse infidus" [by the interpretation of his surname, he is as faithless as the Allobroges (untrustworthy Gauls later overrun by Burgundians) are] (3:§94).

As no. 32 recalls no. 25 retrospectively, so it also anticipates no. 42, where Constable Adam reappears as Nigel's kinsman, a knight who is "*totus admodum succensus face cupiditatis & avaritiæ*" [utterly and completely consumed by the fire of cupidity and avarice] (§136). At the Northampton fair, Adam gratuitously seizes a certain Ranulph, a respected merchant from London. He beats him and drags him to Ely, where he imprisons and tortures him to extort money from him. After a week of suffering, Ranulph finally agrees to pay a ransom, and his young son stands as his pledge. The boy, who is repeatedly threatened with mutilation, prays to St Audrey for help. She appears to him in his cell and tells him that he will be freed the next day. At the predicted hour of noon, Adam is driven mad by devils, and the boy is released.

In the third instance of artificial arrangement, this miracle is immediately preceded by a pair of miracles (nos 40–41) situated in the time of King Edgar and Abbot Brithnod of Ely. In the first, Edgar proposes to expel secular clerics from the monasteries and to replace them with cloistered monks, and he wins the support of many prominent clerics, including Brithnod. When a council meets at Winchester to decide the matter, Christ speaks from a stone crucifix and commands that the secular clerics be cast out. The second recounts St Wihtburga's translation from Dereham to Ely by Abbot Brithnod. He finds that her body is as uncorrupted as the day she was buried some 300 years before. Her sisters, Audrey and Sexburga, are brought out of the church to greet her.

These miracles provide yet another commentary on Bishop Nigel's behavior and function as well to reflect other texts in the sequence. Unlike Nigel, both King Edgar and Brithnod are models of effective, faithful administration who introduce positive reforms and promote the abbey's and St Audrey's interests. In addition, the miracle of the speaking crucifix has strong thematic ties with no. 43, where Nigel raises funds for his campaign against King Stephen by pawning the abbey's treasury with a Jew. Among the treasures is a crucifix donated to St Audrey by King Edgar himself. One of the Jew's friends to whom he shows his prizes desecrates the crucifix by sticking his knife into Christ's eye, which bleeds profusely. The miracle conveys the meaning that Jews must treat crosses and images of God with reverence, but in context with other miracles in the sequence, it most particularly reviles the bishop for plundering St Audrey's treasury and disposing of a relic given to her by her abbey's royal benefactor. In delivering King Edgar's crucifix to blasphemers, Nigel is guilty of blasphemy himself.

The next two miracles (nos 44–45), which are paired by references to the fens surrounding Ely, also comment—the first indirectly, the second more overtly—on Nigel’s character. No. 44 takes place during an epidemic. When the people of London pray to St Audrey for help, she appears to a smith in a dream and tells him to forge rings from a penny he will find on his anvil the next day. Anyone wearing one of the rings will either die within three days or prove to be immune to the disease. When the smith runs out of steel from the penny, he fashions rings of ordinary iron that have the same property. Meanwhile, a young man named Brithmar of Haverhill falls violently ill and prays to St Audrey for relief, whereupon he hears someone speak of a woman who has three of the iron rings. She gives him one. For three successive nights the illness induces nightmares that he is being cudgeled by a monk²² with ever-increasing violence, then he is struck with paralysis. After spending a night in Ely, he wakes up completely cured, but famished. He satisfies his hunger by eating nothing but eels,²³ then hastens to St Audrey’s abbey to give thanks. In nos 32–33, faithless Bishop Nigel prays to St Audrey, and she cripples him for three years and leaves him to die unrepentant. Faithful Brithmar prays to her and is crippled for three days, but she restores his health.

The last of the six artificially placed miracles (no. 45) is devoted to Bishop Nigel’s immediate predecessor, Hervey le Breton. It offers a more direct contrast to Nigel’s evil behavior, for it portrays Hervey, who constructs a causeway across the fens from Soham to Ely, as St Audrey’s loyal servant: “vir ille Deo dilectus in brevi proficiens, opus cælitus provisum explevit” [that man, beloved of God, making great strides in a short time, completed a work foreordained by Heaven] (3:§141). The task is undertaken at the behest of St Edmund, who wishes to have a way to reach his most blessed Audrey on foot (3:§141). Nigel’s failures glare in the light of Hervey’s accomplishment. This miracle is foreshadowed by no. 28, in which a monk named Brithman, who carries St Audrey’s relics along the causeway to strengthen its bridges, cures a sick child with her shift.

²² The choice of the term *detonsus* (3:§140) is humorous, for it brings to mind both *detondere* [to tonsure] and, in reflection of the smith’s source of steel, *detonsor* [coin-clipper]. See R.E. Latham, ed., *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources* (London, 1965).

²³ Eels that give Ely its name. Marie adds the joke that any other man might have died from eating so many of them (vv. 4339–40).

The six artificially ordered miracles draw attention to the Nigel sequence and suggest meaningful readings. Still other miracles reinforce the section's coherence internally. No. 21, which takes place early in Nigel's episcopacy, introduces the themes of obedience, punishment, and forgiveness that are reflected positively and negatively throughout the sequence. It also recounts portentous appearances by a saintly messenger that recur in later visitations by Audrey (nos 28–31, 36–37, 42, 44) and other saints (nos 32, 35, 45; cf. 51). No. 21 portrays St Audrey's messenger as a *virago* (3:§73, etc.), in the classical sense of an Amazon-like warrior (3:§74, etc.), a "persona nobilis, candidis amicta induviis, imperiosæ videlicet mulier auctoritatis" [a noble personage dressed in shining white clothing, that is to say, a woman of imperious authority] (3:§74), who repeatedly beats and wounds a disobedient adolescent girl, as St Wihtburga does in no. 32.²⁴ Most notably, the Nigel sequence also enacts the stories of virtuous monks, genuinely repentant monks, and monks restored to health who stand in stark contrast to their evil bishop and his minions (nos 28–30, 35).

III. *Midpoints*

Marie de France understands the significance of the narrative midpoint and makes it an integral component of her works.²⁵ The *Audree* offers a particularly striking example, for, in translating and abbreviating her exemplar, she reshapes it to highlight a key event in the *Vita*. Her exemplar's midpoint, as its text is preserved in Cotton, falls on fol. 42r, in the vicinity of the first of a string of five miracles (nos 6–10), which are associated with the abbotcy of Simeon.²⁶ Simeon's death, we recall, unleashes the chaotic period evoked in no. 20, which introduces the Bishop Nigel sequence. The miracles involving Simeon in fact foreshadow two sides of the monks' condemnation of Nigel. In contrast to Nigel, on the one hand, Simeon—like Brithnod, Hervey le Breton, and others—is a conscientious administrator who cares for his flock

²⁴ And St Audrey herself, along with her sisters, in no. 9.

²⁵ See, for example, Freeman, "Marie de France's Poetics of Silence"; Kelly, *The Art of Medieval Romance*, pp. 66–67 and 275–78; and Judith Rice Rothschild, "Narrative Movement in Marie de France's *Lais*," paper presented at the 31st International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, 9–11 May 1996. On Marie's *translatio*, see Blanton, *Signs*, pp. 173–95.

²⁶ See n. 8.

and promotes their spiritual and material welfare (no. 6). Moreover, with the aid of St Audrey, he wins out over expropriators who steal her property. In no. 9, Gervase, a land-grabbing sheriff of Cambridge, condemns properties in fraudulent law suits. When Simeon is summoned to defend his abbey's possessions, he bids his monks to pray and chant psalms at Audrey's tomb. On his way to court, he learns that Audrey and her sisters have bludgeoned Gervase to death: "Fit timor Sanctæ per omnes vicinos, multoque tempore nullus...cujuscumque potestatis hominum quidam audebat in Elyensem possessionem, sancta Virgine res suas viriliter ubique protegente" [Fear of the saint spread among all neighbors, and for a long time no man who had any power at all ever dared expropriate property in Ely, for the holy virgin manfully protects her possessions everywhere] (3:§24). Like Nigel, on the other hand, Simeon is an outsider who not only submitted to an irregular consecration by the bishop of Lincoln against the custom of Ely but also brought with him unruly monks from Winchester to fill major administrative posts (no. 10; introduction [3:§25] not translated by Marie).

In her translations of four anachronistic miracles (nos 20, 40–41, 45), all of which involve Nigel's exemplary predecessors, Marie conveys without comment the data indicating non-chronological sequencing. In the miracles anticipating Nigel's death and its aftermath, however, she does not name him, provide dates, or mention his death (no. 32), nor does she associate his evil officers with him (no. 33). That Marie appears indifferent to her exemplar's program of anachronism, that she passes over a death that epitomizes just punishment, that she suppresses Nigel after no. 43 and Geoffrey Ridel in no. 52—all suggest not that she fails to perceive the exemplar's programmatic implications but that she is less concerned than its compiler with the abbey's rights and its internal and external politics. Nor, therefore, is she constrained to honor the compiler's most apposite midpoint, which identifies another exemplary predecessor. Marie's composition embodies a plan of her own making.

Her midpoint episode, which occurs outside the *Miracula* in the vicinity of v. 2313, corresponds with the content of Cotton, fols 25v–26v in the *Vida*: St Audrey's first translation 16 years after her death (AS 1:§§66–71, *Audree* vv. 2213–334). As Marie reshapes her text, she draws attention to many aspects of *translatio*: removal of the saint's body from the abbey's cemetery to the church's interior, to be sure, but also her own work as translator, which shifts emphasis from local

monastic politics to the realm of letters. The saint's translation in fact recalls significant details in the "transmission" of the nightingale in *Laüstic*, where the lady sends the dead bird, wrapped in a shroud bearing her story, to her lover, who seals it in a bejeweled reliquary (*chasse*) with a tight-fitting cover.²⁷ In the church, a miraculous sarcophagus fashioned by God to her dimensions awaits St Audrey: its cover fits so closely that no seam is visible. When her old wooden casket is opened, not bones and decay are revealed, but her unblemished body clad in garments as clean and fresh as on the day she was buried. What is more, the cancerous tumor that killed her has disappeared from her neck, and the wound opened when it was lanced has healed without a trace. Revealed in translation are not just incorruptibility but also perfection. Powers of renewal are discovered at every stage in the translation: in her funeral clothing, in her new sarcophagus, in her wooden casket, and in a fountain newly springing from her grave in the cemetery. At the spring, the afflicted "in pristinum convalescere vigorem memorantur" [are reported to recover their former strength] (1:§71).²⁸

At this point, Marie confronts an anomaly in her exemplar and resolves it, in effect, by reinventing her source (vv. 2335–456). The compiler concludes with an epilogue announcing that his promised work is completed, and he passionately prays St Audrey to intercede with Christ on behalf of himself and all afflicted people who need her. Then he appends passages from Bede devoted to St Audrey (1:§§72–76).²⁹ Narration (by a second compiler?) resumes, however, with a recapitulation of Audrey's death and Sexburga's succession as abbess and finally continues with Sexburga's death, her daughter Ermenhilda's succession, etc. (1:§§77–78).

Marie takes command of her exemplar by amplifying implications in "memorantur" as she subordinates the monastic compiler's voice in her own narration: "Cunoïst cil qui fist l'escrit / Que il a reconté et dist / Ceo qu'il out oï et veü / Et par autre genz entendu..." [The one who wrote the exemplar acknowledges that he has recounted and told

²⁷ Jean Rychner, ed., *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1966), vv. 151–55. Also the sarcophagus in *Deus Amanz*, vv. 243–50.

²⁸ In the *Miracula*, healings at the spring are recounted in a single string (nos 37–38) (see n. 8).

²⁹ The epilogue closely resembles that of St Sexburga's *Vita* attributed to Goscelin (Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Lives of the Female Saints of Ely*, pp. 186–89).

what he had heard and seen himself and heard about from others] (vv. 2335–38). In addition, she profoundly alters the nature of his prayer. Rather than marking closure, in her version he bids for the energy to continue writing and to produce miracles (vv. 2339–46). These are not specifically miracles associated with Audrey's spring, moreover, as the context might suggest,³⁰ but the group of 11 miracles in the *Vita* (vv. 2429–630).³¹ Marie also expunges all signs of the compiler's fervor for St Audrey's powers of intercession and has him pray directly to God. Marie is always reverent toward her subject, but, when she folds other monastic writers into her own narration, as we shall see, she curbs their ecstatic devotion to their saint in harmony with her own voice. Finally, Marie excises the appended material from Bede, perhaps because it does not advance her narrative, but she boldly shows that she has read it by falsely attributing to him subsequent material on SS. Sexburga and Ermenhilda (v. 2382).

IV. *Marie de France and the Miracula*³²

Two of the anachronistic miracles (nos 29 and 35) reflect a self-conscious artistry, even more intense than that of the compiler at Marie's midpoint, which is characteristic of the *Miracula* as a whole. No. 29 is one of several that overtly take the form of personal testimonies to St Audrey's powers by a variety of narrative voices. Outside the Bishop Nigel sequence, in no. 15, for example, Master Radulph of Winchester writes about his miraculous cure in a letter addressed to the monks and lay brothers at Ely (3:§44), while, in no. 18, Osbert, an attorney from Clare (3:§61), sends them news of their saint's miraculous visitation to the merchant Herbert de Forches and a lady in his household, his children's tutor. In both letters, Marie suppresses the epistolary devices and asserts instead that the authors visited Ely personally to attest to the saint's powers, thus subjecting their witness to her own narration.

No. 29 is well known because it is signed by a monk, Thomas, whom many, including Daniel Papebroch, Östen Södergård, and library

³⁰ And as *LE* 1:§131 makes explicit.

³¹ See n. 11.

³² Parts of this section were read as Pickens, "Translation and *Translatio* in the *Vie seinte Audree*."

cataloguers, have taken to be the author/compiler of both Cotton and *LE*. In his exordium, Thomas appears as both eye-witness to and participant in a miracle:

Cum innumerabilia, per Sanctorum suorum merita insignia, quaquaversum per orbis climata operetur Deus suæ [potentiæ] magnalia; plura sunt, quæ modernorum scriptorum incuria memoriali paginæ minime commendantur, reiteranda: cujus injuriæ illi præcipue arguuntur, qui litteralis scientiæ officio delegantur. Ne igitur hujusmodi offensæ ab æmulis accuser crimine, quoddam quod contigit miraculum in instanti tempore, *in meipso Thoma nomine*, B. Etheldredæ meritis & intercessione, *pro capacitate mea*, ad ejus laudem & gloriam, dignum duxi omnibus exponere. (3:§103, my emphasis)³³

[Since God performs in every quarter of the globe countless mighty demonstrations of His power through the extraordinary merits of His saints, many miracles that have been inadequately committed to the memorial page due to the carelessness of modern writers must be told anew. This is a fault that especially those devoted to exercising literary expertise condemn. So, lest I be charged by rivals with such an offense, I have deemed something—a miracle!—that has happened in present days through the merits and intercession of Blessed Audrey to be worthy of making public *to the best of my abilities and in my own name, Thomas.*]

E.O. Blake persuasively argues that this Thomas is not the author of *LE*, in part because the style of his miracle, with its flamboyant language and use of rhyming prose, is unmatched anywhere else in the book.³⁴ Thomas's miracle also stands out as stylistically exceptional in Cotton.³⁵

Despite its ostentatious style, the miracle is of moderate complexity as a narrative. The monk-narrator falls ill and has a dream forecasting his recovery: he hears Mass in church, where he strongly feels the presence of St Audrey, to whom he has prayed in earnest, and then he actually sees her as he returns to the dormitory. Thomas's vision is unique in the *Miracula* in that the saint does not speak to him. Rather, he sees her in the act of cleaning his bed and, with her sleeve,

³³ The theme recurs in the epilogue (§107).

³⁴ Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, pp. xlvi–ix.

³⁵ Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, pp. xxxviii–xlix, proposes another monk, Richard II of Ely, as a possible compiler of *LE* (see Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Lives of the Female Saints of Ely*, p. xxii), but Fairweather observes (*Liber Eliensis: A History*, pp. xvii and 346nn, etc.) that it would be difficult to ascribe to him even the chapters where he is named as author of a history (*LE* 3:§44–45, etc.).

“*extergens quisquillas & contagia pulverum*” [wiping off the debris and contagion of dust bits] (3:§106). As it is prophetic, the dream is a transparent allegory in which the bed represents the monk’s body and the dust and trash signify his disease. The compiler meaningfully pairs Thomas’s miracle with no. 30,³⁶ where another ill monk also sees St Audrey in a dream “*ora chlamydis suæ quasi sudorem detergens, & de super illum pulverem totum abiciens...*” [wiping away something like sweat with the edge of her cloak, she cleansed him of all the dust] (3:§108).

Marie’s reading of Thomas’s miracle is particularly instructive. Her translation is essentially an exercise in abbreviation, but she also adds significant details by means of amplification and elaborately interprets other aspects of her model. She conflates the two parts of Thomas’s vision, his attendance at Mass and his return to his bed, apparently drawing further inspiration from no. 18 (the vision shared by Herbert de Forches and his children’s tutor), the only Latin miracle in which St Audrey appears in her church:

Dedenz l’eglise out un autiel
De marbre, il [Thomas] ne vit unkes tel.
Une bele dame en estant
I vit et ele oiroit devant.
Avis li fu qu’a Deu oroit
Pur li et [ke] merci crioit.
Puis vint a lui, si li hostoit
Ou un blanc drap k’ele portoit
La poudre k’il ot sur son vis. (vv. 3857–65)

[Inside the church was a marble altar such as he had never seen. He saw a beautiful lady standing there, praying before the altar. It seemed to him that she was praying to God for him and crying for mercy. Then she came to him; with a white cloth she was holding she wiped the dust from his face.]

In Marie’s translation, moreover, Thomas is attended by a physician who despairs of his recovery (vv. 3827–28), whereas the only doctor mentioned in the Latin text is God, the “*summum Medicum*” [the supreme Physician] (3:§104) whom Thomas prays St Audrey to call to his aid. In Marie’s version, Thomas lies ill for three days (vv. 3824–25)

³⁶ The juxtaposition is deliberate: nos 29 and 30 are in different strings (see n. 8).

before assembling his brothers to witness his final confession, and, in his prayer to St Audrey, he promises to amend his life and leave folly behind him (vv. 3849–50), whereas, in the original, he prays to be restored to health.

Even more significantly, Marie ascribes to Thomas's illness an explicit cause and effect that are unspecified in her exemplar. Thomas writes that "quasi suffocatus vix potui perpauca verba formare" [like a man suffocating, I could hardly form even a few words] (3:§104), but in Marie's translation, by his own testimony, his loss of speech is absolute: "il ne peut parler de treis jurs" [he could not speak for three days] (vv. 3825). As for the cause, Thomas writes ambiguously that "Dispensante igitur divina gratia, . . . intolerabili valetudinis gravis torquebar angustia" [In a dispensation of Divine Grace, I was tortured by the unbearable anguish of a serious illness] (3:§103). By contrast, Marie is unequivocally—and inventively—emphatic. Thomas is

... Un clerc ke sout mut lettr[e]üre.
 Pur la sciënce k'il savoit
 Orguillius ert, sovent fesoit
 Tel chose ke [n']avenoit mie
 Ke clerc deüt mener tel vie.
 Par li meïme avons oÿ
 K'en grant maladie chaÿ
 K'il ne peut parler de treis jurs.
 De vie n'atendoit socurs
 Le mire, ne cil ke le gardoient
 Neule santé ne esperoient. (vv. 3818–28)

[a clerk who knew much about letters. Because of his learning, he was proud and often did things unbecoming to a clerk. Directly from him we have heard that he fell gravely ill and could not speak for three days. The doctor did not expect him to live, and those taking care of him had no hope for his recovery.]

Marie surely recognizes the importance of Thomas's concerns with matters of composition, style, and textual transmission in his exordium and epilogue and in the display of his hexameters with internal rhymes and his rhyming prose, which are found primarily in rather self-indulgent descriptions of his physical and mental suffering (§103). Moreover, she appears to have ascribed significance to the comparatively restrained tone in his closing remarks (§107) that contrasts so sharply with the bravado of his prologue and may imply a conversion. It is appropriately ironic, in any case, that a prideful worker of words

should be struck dumb.³⁷ The discovery of a connection between the narrator's style and his sickness and healing, however, results from an informed reading founded in Marie's literary interests that include recognition of her own ties to a writer like Thomas and perhaps her own excessive pride past or present. Marie does not portray Thomas as an author/compiler of miracles, although she credits him with writing the source of this one: "Il meïsmes fist cest escrit / Del miracle k'avons redit" [He himself wrote the account of the miracle we have retold] (vv. 3872–73). In the context of Thomas's miracle in the *Miracula*, his voice also embraces the two subsequent ones, which are anonymous: nos 30, about a monk "of our house" (3:§108), and 31, about "a wondrous event we commemorate" (3:§109). Just as Marie mutes Thomas's voice in no. 29, so she subjects him to herself by removing references to a first person in nos 30–31.

At the same time, she sustains the *mise en abyme* manifest in Thomas's miracle by explicitly forging links between it and no. 35, which portrays the conversion of another writer, a pupil of Julian the rhetorician (3:§118).³⁸ This monk's exordium (3:§117) brings together a complex variety of information. First, he evokes *conjointure* in a way that recalls Thomas's prologue: "Multa huic congruere noscuntur historiae, quæ [cum] summis Poëtarum eloqui contingeret difficile; maxime imperitus & ignotæ linguæ nullatenus valet apprehendere" [Many things can be recognized as coming together in this story that would be hard for the greatest of poets to express. A highly unskilled man with an unpracticed tongue could by no means understand how] (3:§117). He then turns to his personal relationship with St Audrey, asserting that her special protection has led him to a conversion and implying that he owes to her his ability to speak and therefore to write:

Sed sperans in Domino Deo, qui linguas infantium facit disertas, & os bruti animalis aperuit; credo me in resurrectione partem habiturus cum dominatrice mea benignissima Etheldreda; ipsa, inquam, post Deum & ejus piissimam Genetricem, mihi in refugium semper erit & doloris remedium; ipsa, quæ me educavit & adduxit in hanc diem lucis, & miserta mei peccata & scelera graviter ingemiscentis, quibus iram merui & tenebras exilii... (§3:117)

³⁷ In no. 21, Marie adds that a blinded girl speaks disrespectfully to her mother and is punished with loss of the power of speech.

³⁸ *Iulianus* in *LE* (3:§93), misread as *Vilianus* in *AS* (3:§118).

[But, hoping in the Lord God, who makes the tongues of the speechless eloquent and has opened the mouth of the brute animal, I believe that I shall share in the resurrection of the dead with my liege lady, the most benevolent Audrey. After God and His most holy Mother, she, I say, shall always be a refuge for me and a healer of grief. She, who raised me up and led me into this day full of light, took pity on the shortcomings and wickedness of a heavily sighing sinner for which I deserved wrath and the dark shadows of exile.]

Finally, he claims authorship of a book of miracles in which he has brought together, in her honor, texts from far and wide, an achievement that recalls the “many things coming together” of his opening sentence: “*cujus gloriæ libellum ac velut novum testamentum erexi in titulum, & notitiam virtutum ejus & lucernam exaltavi de submodio in altum, atque ea sparsim scripta congregavi in unum, non meo dictante studio, sed Dei inspirante & adjuvante gratia*” [to whose glory I have erected as a monument a little book like a “new testament”; I have raised up knowledge of her powers and their light from the depths to the heights and have brought together into one work writings from all over—thanks not to the dictates of my efforts, but to God’s inspiration and help] (3:§117).

As he expresses in words of despair reminiscent of Psalms 37/38 and 41/42, however, the production of his book and its reception have brought him great physical, mental, and spiritual anguish:

Dereliquit me virtus mea & lumen oculorum meorum & ipsum non est mecum; & Tota die verba mea execrabantur adversum me, eo quod dicitur mihi per singulos dies, Ubi est Deus tuus? ubi est spes tua? vel ubi Etheldreda tua, quam tibi continue subsidium ferre pollicitus es? in quibus profuit aut nunc prodest? hanc laudas & colis, amas & veneraris, corde et ore pariter & scriptorum titulis commendare satagis... Tua scripta vel dicta non suscipimus, despiciamus, abjicimus. (3:§117)

[My strength and the light of my eyes deserted me and were far from me, and all day long my words hurled curses against me. For daily people said to me, “Where is your God? Where is your hope?” Even, “Where is your Audrey, who you declared would constantly bring you comfort? In which of these has there been or is there now anything beneficial? You praise and worship her, love and pray to her with your heart and mouth alike, and do your utmost to commemorate her in written texts... We do not accept the things you write or say. We despise them, we reject them.”]

The movements of this opening are replicated in the narrative that follows. Most significantly, the last passage cited, which displays an extravagant emphasis far surpassing Thomas, appears to be a digression,

and the writer treats it as such in his next sentence (3:§118). By the time the story reaches its conclusion, however, it is in fact clear that the “digression” accounts for his very *causa scribendi*. Reference to the writer’s suffering in fact constitutes an artificially ordered beginning *in medias res*.

After this “digression,” narration turns back several years to the story of Julian (3:§118), a most learned man who taught the liberal arts abroad and in London before taking refuge at Ely during the civil war, and he becomes a glory to the abbey. He is particularly devoted to two pupils, both of whom entered the abbey in early boyhood, and he showers them with fatherly attention. One is proud, haughty, and vain, subject to every vice, contemptuous of monastic rule, a sower of discord, but, by the grace of God he has experienced a conversion and has become a special devotee of St Audrey: “quamvis sub negligentia tempus suum consumpsisset, tamen Dei Virginem Etheldredam tota mente dilexit; & in devotionem ipsius per ardorem accensus, de vita & virtutibus illius libellum suo labore edidit” [although he had spent his time negligently, he came to love God’s virgin Audrey with all his heart, and, kindled with ardor in devotion to her, he produced by his labors a little book about her life and miracles] (3:§119).

Meanwhile, the other boy, ever a model of perfection and devotion to the scholarly life, has also been especially drawn to St Audrey. He enters the priesthood but soon dies. Shortly thereafter, on a porch of the abbey church, or in a side chapel or a gallery dedicated to St Paul,³⁹ he appears to his erstwhile “neglectful companion,” not as a ghost or a phantasm but as a living being who takes him by the hand. He is the messenger of divine mercy whose purpose is to impart an astonishing vision of heaven:

Fui in cælum ante conspectum divinæ Majestatis, ubi & sanctissimam Virginem contemplabar Etheldredam, librum in manu tenentem, coram summo Deo flectentem suppliciter genua; insuper illam, referentem gratiarum actiones, ore suo sæpius memorato fratri, exprimere illum nomine; quia in testamentum gloriæ suæ & perpetuam memoriam eundem edibit librum. (3:§121)

³⁹ “...in porticu B. Pauli” (3:§121). Latham (*porticus/-i*) gives “chapel for a minor altar,” but *porticu* is 4th decl. (“porch,” “portico”). Niermeyer (*porticus*, decl. unspecified) has “narthex,” “apse” or “gallery”; “porch” also applies. See J.F. Niermeyer, ed., *Mediæ latinitatis lexicon minus* (Leiden, 1976).

[I was in heaven in sight of the divine Majesty, and there I gazed at the most holy virgin Audrey, kneeling in supplication with a book in her hand in the presence of God most high. And far above her, as He repeatedly thanked a much talked-about brother with His own mouth, I saw Him identify him by name, for he has published that very book in testimony and everlasting commemoration of His glory.]

The writer assures his reader that the brother who saw his dead friend is trustworthy, and he has given him in writing an account of the miracle which the writer has hastened to include in his own collection (3:§121).

Despite his efforts to distance himself rhetorically from the surviving brother, the writer and Julian's neglectful pupil are implicitly one and the same. Both experience conversion with moaning and sighing, both have a special relationship with St Audrey, both have written and compiled collections of her miracles, and both have suffered anguish for which the dead companion's message is designed to bring comfort as St Audrey's gift of his book is accepted by God Himself. That unruly troublemaker has become a "new man" who has produced a book of miracles by putting to use the knowledge and skills imparted by his teacher Julian. Doubtless his rejection by readers in the monastery stems from their acquaintance with the "old man" and their disbelief in the sincerity of his conversion, but the miracle in any case authenticates both his conversion and the book that he has produced in its wake.

In Marie's translation, just as she abbreviates Thomas's conversion experience and substitutes for his encounter with St Audrey that of Herbert de Forches and his tutor (no. 18), so she also identifies Thomas's miracle with that of Julian's pupil when she attributes to Thomas the sin of pride in his rhetorical accomplishments. Thus she understands and puts into practice a principle of pairing and linking miracles that, as we have frequently observed, characterizes the *Miracula* as a whole. Moreover, the fact that Marie foregrounds what Thomas and Julian's unruly pupil have in common further indicates that one intelligent contemporary reader of the *Miracula* may also have understood Julian's pupil, as well as other anonymous self-conscious narrators, to have been Thomas himself.

Another borrowing from no. 18 that surfaces, this time in no. 35, suggests an even more significant aspect of Marie's strategy as translator. Whereas in the *Miracula* Julian's obedient pupil intimates that he has seen St Audrey kneeling before God in heaven with his friend's

book in her hand, in Marie's translation she kneels there holding a psalter (v. 4041). The tutor in no. 18 likewise sees St Audrey with a wax taper in one hand and a *psalterium* in the other (3:§63). Like Old French *sautier* (vv. 3383, 4041), Latin *psalterium* is ambiguous in denoting a book (psalter) or a musical instrument (psaltery). In no. 18, and in Marie's translation of it, the context in fact suggests the latter, for the saint and the tutor are soon enveloped in angelic music. In no. 29, Thomas hears music in his vision of St Audrey, but Marie describes nothing that she may be holding. In no. 35, however, Marie replaces with a *sautier* (v. 4036) the book of miracles that St Audrey offers to God on behalf of Julian's student (3:§121).

This is among the most heavily rewritten of the *Miracula* in Marie's *Audree*. A few differences may result from a rare misreading of her exemplar. Julian's pupil mentions that his master had taught in London before coming to Ely; implicitly, the two companions completed their schooling with him at Ely and remain there. In Marie's translation, however, Julian takes the boys with him back to London. The narrator's vision in the *Miracula* occurs inside or just outside the abbey church in a space dedicated to St Paul, but in Marie's translation, in consonance with the new information, the friends meet "A Seint Paul devant le mostier" [in front of St Paul's church] (v. 4035), that is, the cathedral in London. A careless error? Or in fact does Marie purposefully invent her subject's "translation"?

In any case, Marie introduces her version of the miracle with a characteristic abbreviation—"Si nos conte de Julien, / Un clerc ke mut avoit grant bien. / Mut sout des ars, bien fu lettrez" [The exemplar tells about Julian, a most worthy clerk who was well versed in the arts and skilled in Latin] (vv. 4011–13)—followed by an extended amplification. In Cotton, Julian's pupil mentions Bishop Nigel once, to situate the miracle in his episcopacy (3:§118). Marie amplifies by inventing, then exaggerating, a great love between Julian and Nigel, and she suggests that the trust implicit in Julian's ability to take two young monks back to London with him depends upon that affection (vv. 4014–26). Given the vituperation against Nigel she found elsewhere in her exemplar, perhaps her amplification is ironic. Or else it grows out of the "misreading" or purposeful "translation" and is required as a plausible explanation as to why Nigel, an outsider, consents to sending two of his charges away to complete their education with another outsider.

Other examples of Marie's rewriting are of greater moment. Foremost is the fact that, like her exemplar, Marie recounts the miracle's

primary events in the third person, but, as she excises the first-person commentary and autobiographical narrative that mark the original, she does not imply a personal identification of narrator and character. As she abbreviates, she simultaneously rearranges the events in natural order. With the locale of the unruly clerk's vision switched to London, she rationalizes the vision as a nocturnal dream instead of a waking experience (vv. 4033–34). We have seen how Marie models the encounter on St Audrey's appearance in no. 18, as she does in no. 29, and substitutes the saint's psalter for the clerk's book. In addition, she shifts the form of the saint's prayer to God from an offering in thanksgiving to an appeal: "Et si l'oÿ pur li prier" [and he heard her praying for him] (v. 4042). Finally, the function of the dream/vision's message changes from validation of the clerk's literary endeavors to proof that the saint has interceded for him. As a consequence, the dream itself, in Marie's translation, and not the production of the book of miracles, becomes the stimulus for the clerk's conversion (v. 4046), which in turn initiates a literary project: "S'avision ad recontee / Come ma dame seinte Audree / Par la grant merite de li / De ses pechiez l'out departi" [He has recounted this dream, how my lady St Audrey through her great merit freed him from his sins] (vv. 4047–50). In no. 35, more explicitly than in no. 29, Marie curtails the creative role of the clerkly narrator by not claiming his text(s) as her source. Attention thus shifts from his book to hers.

In the paired miracles, Thomas and his double stand out, in opposition to Nigel and his henchmen, as examples of virtuous and productive clerics such as Brithmar (no. 28), who maintains the causeway with St Audrey's relics and heals a sick child, or such as pious, crippled Johan in no. 30, whom St Audrey visits to wipe away the dust of contagion. Nos 29 and 35 are also linked thematically to others outside the Nigel section that make reference to reading, writing, and assembling accounts of miracles.

In no. 10, which is highlighted at the midpoint of Marie's exemplar, a monk named Godric, in another ecstatic vision, sees an archer aiming an arrow at the abbey church in Ely, a portent of danger to the many monks who have been stricken in an epidemic and lie deathly ill in the infirmary. In heaven, St Audrey implores God to prevent the disaster, and He is moved by her tears. When Godric awakens, he prays for his brothers before the high altar. In another vision he sees St Audrey and her sainted sisters and niece rise from their tombs, and he follows them to the infirmary. Like a mother caring for her children,

St Audrey ministers to the sick, as in nos 29–30, by wiping away the dust of their contagion. The next morning, Godric finds that his brothers have been cured.

In joyful celebration, Abbot Simeon and his monks wish to have the miracle written down for the edification of posterity, but a certain Goscelin is already engaged in such a project:

Intererat tunc Monachus quidam, Gocelinus nomine, disertissimus; undique per Angliam vitas, miracula & gesta Sanctorum Sanctarumque in Historiis, in Prosis, dictando mutavit. Cum autem ille alius, per voluntatem Dei oculo cordis dilato, secreta penetravit cælestia; tunc iste, non somno pigritiæ indulgens, eodem momoento & hora circa Prosam Ætheldredæ, cujus initium est, Christo Regi sit gloria, fortuito intendebat; in qua etiam infertur Versus, Adstat a dextris Regina, interventrix alta, hæc dat terris miracula. Quod divina inspirante voluntate, adhuc facti nescius, miraculum ita componendum figuraliter excepit: & dum produxit in publico, Deo gratias sanctæque Ætheldredæ cuncti dixerunt; prosamque deinceps, ob memoriam venerationis illius, decantari decreverunt. (3:§30)

[Among them at that time was a certain very eloquent monk, Goscelin by name. He went everywhere throughout England reciting in story and song the lives, miracles, and acts of saints. As the abbot, whose heart's eye had been opened wide by the will of God, was penetrating heavenly secrets, Goscelin, not lost in a dream of indolence, was by chance, at that very moment and hour, hard at work on "The Sequence of Audrey," the opening of which is "Glory be to Christ the King," and where are included the verses "The Queen stands on the right, / that exalted media-trix / who bestows these miracles on the world." All who were there said that it was by the consent of divine inspiration that, ignorant of events up to that point, he began thus arranging the miracle schematically as, by the grace of God and St Audrey, he produced it in public, and one after another they decided that the song should be sung for remembrance of her veneration.]⁴⁰

The production of Goscelin's song is thus a second miraculous event. Significantly, no. 10 is not his miracle, which is presumably in verse, but an anonymous, parallel prose account of the two miracles combined. In her translation, Marie abbreviates her exemplar by eliminating the second miracle and refraining from quoting Goscelin's text. Instead,

⁴⁰ Goscelin's miracles are in Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Lives of the Female Saints of Ely*, pp. 95–131. They elaborate those recounted in the *Vita* (AS 1:§§85–92, LE 1:§§41–49, *Audree* vv. 2429–630). Except for the lines given, Goscelin's *prosa* is lost (Love, pp. xix–xx).

she counts him among the monks who are cured, and in thanks he writes a sequence praising St Audrey that is still sung at the abbey (vv. 3125–28). More generally, Marie interprets her source's reference to Goscelin's performances of saint's lives as acts, not of authoritative textual production, but of translation: "...mout amoit / Vies des seins k'il translatoit" [he dearly loved saints' lives, which he translated] (vv. 3123–24). He reflects Marie as translator, and his status is no higher than hers.

No. 53, which closes Marie's exemplar, is an appropriate text with which to conclude discussion of her art of translation, for it arcs back over the *Vita* to portray an extraordinary event in Audrey's life. Here the miraculous operates at three levels of narration. The text's main body is an extended secondary narration, recorded by a clerkly writer at Ely, in which an elderly monk dictates an account of a miracle he witnessed as a boy when his father read an English text aloud (3:§§158–59). He then relates and comments upon the miracle he had heard (§§160–63). Finally, the writer experiences a third miracle in the process of composing his work (*opusculum*) (§164).

The old man, whose veracity is guaranteed by his age and the probity of his ways (§158), recalls that his father often read aloud biblical commentaries, saints' lives, and miracles and discussed them with his guests. One day he overheard him reading from an English book, apparently to a multi-lingual audience, for, as on the first Pentecost, "præsentes vel quisque adveniens, quod legebat, in sua lingua plene saperent & intelligerent" [those who were present, or happened in, fully understood in their own language what he was reading] (§159). Spell-bound, the boy recognizes the text to be a *Life* of St Audrey, and he vows to memorize it so that he may relate it to others. His main purpose in collaborating with his brother is to have him write down not the Pentecostal miracle but the miraculous event in Audrey's life (§159).

It is a unique domestic incident during Audrey's marriage to her first husband, Tombert. Contrary to her life as chronicled in Marie's exemplar (esp. AS 1:§§13–17, *Audree* vv. 265–470), where husband and wife live in a harmonious chastity that reflects that of the Holy Family, the old monk admits the possibility of marital disagreement:

...forte evenit, ut occasio litis vel commotionis non levis orietur inter eos. Sed, credo, hoc Domini voluntate atque providentia contigisse, non instinctu inimici & fraude maligna, ut unitatem illorum quateret, & sic

discordes dejungeret, quod in pluribus contingere solet; sed potius ut altitudo utriusque meritorum patesceret, & eorum gloria manifestata mundo appareret. (3:\$160)

[it happened occasionally that a dispute or a stirring of not lighthearted feeling broke out between them, but I believe this happened by the will and providence of the Lord, not through any hostile instinct or malicious scheming that might break up their union and divide an unharmorous couple, as happens in many cases, but rather so that the loftiness of each one's merits might be increased and their glory appear clearly to the world.]

Discord surfaces when, more like Audrey's second husband, King Egfrid of Northumbria (AS 1:\$29–38, *Audree* vv. 981–1424), Tombert breaks into a room where she and her ladies are weaving and sewing and demands his conjugal rights. Mindful of biblical injunctions against unruly wives, Audrey suffers his verbal onslaught in patient silence. She finally takes off one of her gloves, throwing it to the floor in exasperation, but it remains suspended in midair, held up by sunbeams streaming in through the window—an awe-inspiring display for all to wonder at (3:\$161). Tombert is immediately subdued. He begs her forgiveness, which she grants, and lovingly puts the glove back on her hand, blessing and praising God for His mercies.

At the conclusion of his *opusculum*, the writer confesses to his brothers that he was in great turmoil as he wrote, unable to make up his mind about the worth of his enterprise, fearing, like Julian's pupil, the jeers and laughter of disbelieving detractors, and wondering, in reference to both miracles and especially the story about his saint, whether he should publicly state anything so unheard of (\$164). Certainly one reason for his dilemma is that both the matter of the suspended glove and its context of domestic dissent are foreign to the content and tenor of St Audrey's life as it is preserved at Ely. As he lay in bed one night, however, a voice told him in a dream that everything he has written down is true. Convinced that the message has come from God and St Audrey, he accedes to the divine command to convey his text to his brothers.

This highly self-conscious writer is like others who are tormented by and for their work but are miraculously vindicated by God and St Audrey. And, as Marie treats most of his ilk, she dismisses him as the author of a text she translates just as she ignores the ways he suffers for his art. While her version of the incident in the saint's life (vv. 4557–96) faithfully follows that of her exemplar, she completely

rewrites the frame. Instead of an old man recalling a decisive event in his childhood, Marie has her protagonist read the miracle of the glove for himself in an English *Life*; thus she excises the miracle of its reception. And instead of an anguished writer, he, not readers he fears, is the doubter (vv. 4597–98). St Audrey comes to him in a dream, not to soothe his pain but to admonish him to believe what he has read, and he relays his experience to his brothers the very next day (vv. 4593–606).

As in the *Fables* and the *Espurgatoire*, where, in translating from Latin into French, Marie marks them as her own,⁴¹ the *Audree* translator effaces the individual monks at Ely whose disparate writings constitute the book that is her exemplar, and, reconciling a profusion of styles and narrative voices, she unifies them in her own way and in her own voice: “Ici escriis mon non Marie / Pur que soie remembre” [Here I write my name, Marie, so that I may be remembered] (vv. 4624–25).

V. Afterword

To return to the question of the relationship between Cotton and *LE*, many scholars interested in the *Audree*, at least since 1990, have ignored implications in Södergård’s introduction⁴² and have insisted that *LE* is its source.⁴³ The reasons for this are understandable. Södergård compares *Audree* with AS, but Papebroch’s edition, based on transcriptions of Cotton, is very difficult to use. Much essential material is excised, including the rubricated *tituli* and matter printed elsewhere in AS, unwarranted spelling changes appear sporadically, matter is rearranged—for example, the *Ely Cartulary*, an abbreviation of *LE*, Book 2, is arbitrarily inserted between the *Vita* and *Secunda*

⁴¹ See, for example, Pickens, “Courtly Acculturation in the *Lais* and *Fables* of Marie de France,” in *Court and Cultural Diversity*, ed. John Thompson and Evelyn Mullally (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 27–36, and “Marie de France Translatrix: *L’Espurgatoire seint Patriz*,” *Le Cygne* 1 n.s. (2002), 7–24.

⁴² See n. 5.

⁴³ Christine Wille Garrison, *The Lives of Ætheldreda: Representation of Female Sanctity from 700 to 1300* (Diss., University of Rochester, 1990). See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture c. 1150–1300* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 207–12; and McCash, “Vie,” pp. 757–59; but see McCash and Barban, *Life of Saint Audrey*, pp. 8–9.

*translation*⁴⁴—medieval textual divisions are ignored, and errors inevitably slip in. Scholars cannot use *AS* to comprehend how Marie worked as translator without constantly compensating for such shortcomings. By contrast, Blake's edition of *LE* is user-friendly, and it has recently been translated by Janet Fairweather. A new edition and, yes, a translation of Cotton are sorely needed.

Another reason why deeper knowledge of Cotton is essential is that scholars working with Latin texts written and copied in medieval Ely and elsewhere often misconstrue its significance. Many, including Blake and Rosalind Love,⁴⁵ take Cotton for what it may look like superficially—a late variant of *LE* dating from around 1300. But *Audree* studies are beginning to demonstrate that the “super-saint’s life” preserved in Cotton is a copy of a text that existed precisely in the last quarter of the 12th century. One reason why we know this to be true is that Marie de France translated it.

⁴⁴ The *Cartulary* clearly lies outside the “super-saint’s life.” See n. 56.

⁴⁵ Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, p. xxv; and Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Lives of the Female Saints of Ely*, pp. lxvii–lxviii. Blanton’s assessment is ambivalent: *Audree*’s “source text” is *LE* (*Signs*, p. 180, see Table, pp. 9–10), yet it is likely that “a lost original [of Cotton] dating from the time of the translation is the source for Marie’s text” (p. 181).

*Appendix*⁴⁶*Miracula Sancte Etheldrede*

- 0a. Prologus i[n] Miraculos [*sic*] Sancte Etheldrede⁴⁷ [Prologue to the *Miracles of St Audrey*] *Audree* vv. 2785–816; Cotton fols 36ra–37va, AS 3:§§1–4^{*48}
- 0b. *Audree* vv. 2817–22, Cotton fol. 37va, cf. AS 3:§5*
1. De Azone nostro monacho ab estu febrium liberato [About our monk Azo cured of burning fevers] *Audree* vv. 2823–40; Cotton fols 37va–38vb*, AS 3:§§6–7*
 - Incipit Liber miraculorum sponse Christi sanctissime virginis Etheldrede [Here begins the *Book of Miracles* of the bride of Christ, the most holy virgin Audrey]⁴⁹ Cotton fol. 38vb
 2. Quomodo Rex Ædgarus, divinitus inspiratus, per sanctum pontificem Æthelwoldum, Elyensem restauravit ecclesiam [How King Edgar, divinely inspired, with the aid of the holy bishop Æthelwold, restored the church at Ely] *Audree* vv. 2841–88; Cotton fols 38vb–39va, AS 3:f.§7 (=2:§§3–7),⁵⁰ *LE* 2:§1
 3. Privilegium Ædgari Regis gloriosi [The privilege of glorious King Edgar] *Audree* vv. 2889–904;⁵¹ Cotton fols 39va–40ra, AS 3:f.§7 (= 2:§§8–10), *LE* 2:§5
 4. Quam districte Deus vindicaverit injurias dilecte sue virginis Etheldrede [How severely God avenged wrongs against his beloved virgin Audrey] *Audree* vv. 2905–32; Cotton fols 40ra–40vb, AS 3:§§8–9, *LE* 3:§119
 5. Iterum quomodo Deus vindictam fecerit de hostibus beate virginis Etheldrede [Again, how God wreaked vengeance against enemies of the blessed virgin Audrey] *Audree* vv. 2933–52; Cotton fols 40vb–41ra, AS 3:§§10–11, *LE* 3:§120

⁴⁶ Items not in *LE* are marked with an asterisk. *LE* transmits six miracles plus a prologue not in Cotton (see n. 11).

⁴⁷ Rubrics are as in Cotton with emendations (bracketed) from *LE*.

⁴⁸ An abbreviation of the punishment of a Danish warrior who desecrates the saint's tomb (AS 1:§§85–86, *Audree* vv. 2429–52) is attached to the following miracle.

⁴⁹ An earlier *Liber miraculorum* appears to have been subsumed in the *Miracula*.

⁵⁰ AS does not repeat the text from Papebroch's Book 2 (*Ely Cartulary*) that recurs in the *Miracula* (see n. 56).

⁵¹ No textual division before line 2889 in Add. 70513.

6. De quodam fratre, qui mente excesserat, sed meritis sancte Etheldrede sanato [About a brother who had gone out of his mind, but was healed by the merits St Audrey] *Audree* vv. 2953–94; Cotton fols 41ra–42ra, AS 3:§§12–16, *LE* 2:§129
7. De duobus mutis [About two mutes] *Audree* vv. 2995–3004; Cotton fols 42ra–42va, AS 3:§§17–18, *LE* 2:§130
8. De Picoto Vice-comite, qui multa incommoda huic gessit ecclesie [About Sheriff Picot, who inflicted much harm on this church] *Audree* vv. 3005–26; Cotton fols 42va–43ra, AS 3:§§19–21, *LE* 2:§131
9. De Gervasio, qui homines sancte Etheldrede valde infestabat et cruciabat [About Gervase, who greatly mistreated and tormented St Audrey's men] *Audree* vv. 3027–76; Cotton fols 43ra–43va, AS 3:§§22–24, *LE* 2:§132
10. Quomodo Dominus Deus, precibus sancte virginis Etheldrede placatus, indignationem suam et iram de hoc loco averterit [How the Lord God, mollified by the holy virgin Audrey's prayers, turned his wrath and indignation from this place] *Audree* vv. 3077–128; Cotton fols 43va–45ra, AS 3:§§25–30, *LE* 2:§133
11. Quomodo post mortem Comes Willielmus Warennie sit damnatus in anima [How after his death Count William of Warenne was damned in his soul] *Audree* vv. 3129–50; Cotton fol. 45ra–b, AS 3:§31, *LE* 2:§119
12. Quod turris ad portam ecclesie sancte Etheldrede ab igne fulguris erepta est [That the tower at the door of St Audrey's church was saved from a fire caused by lightning] *Audree* vv. 3151–68; Cotton fols 45ra–45rb, AS 3:§32, *LE* 3:§28
13. De captiv[o] per beatam Etheldredam soluto [About a prisoner set free by Blessed Audrey] *Audree* vv. 3169–240; Cotton fols 45va–47va, AS 3:§§33–41, *LE* 3:§33
14. Quomodo quidam a dolore dentium curatur [How a man is cured of a tooth ache] *Audree* vv. 3241–62; Cotton fols 47va–48ra, AS 3:§§42–43, *LE* 3:§34
15. De Magistro Radulpho ab inflammatione gutteris sanato [About Master Ranulph healed from an inflammation of the throat] *Audree* vv. 3263–94; Cotton fols 48ra–49vb, AS 3:§§44–50, *LE* 3:§35
16. Quod quidam, membris omnibus destitutus, pristina redditur sanati [That a man, debilitated in all parts of his body, is restored to perfect health] *Audree* vv. 3295–328; Cotton fols 49vb–51ra, AS 3:§§51–56, *LE* 3:§36

17. Quod apparens sancta Etheldreda infirmanti sanitem promisit [That St Audrey, appearing to a sick man, promised him health] *Audree* vv. 3329–64; Cotton fols 51ra–51vb, AS 3:§§57–60, *LE* 3:§42
18. Quod sancta Etheldreda a muliere visa est in quadam ecclesia [That St Audrey was seen by a woman in a church] *Audree* vv. 3365–410; Cotton fols 51vb–53ra, AS 3:§§61–65, *LE* 3:§43
19. Quomodo captivus per sanctam Etheldredam liberatus evasit [How a prisoner came out a free man thanks to St Audrey] *Audree* vv. 3411–46; Cotton fols 53ra–53va, AS 3:§§66–68*
20. Que damna extranei loco intulerint! [What losses were incurred in a strange place!] *Audree* vv. 3447–72; Cotton fols 53va–54ra, AS 3:§§69–71*
21. De puella, dextro oculo cecata, ad sanctam Etheldredam illuminata [About a girl, blinded in her right eye, restored to sight by St Audrey] *Audree* vv. 3473–562; Cotton fols 54ra–57ra, AS 3:§§72–84, *LE* 3:§60
22. Quod mulier, invocata sancta Etheldreda, curatur [That a woman is cured after calling on St Audrey] *Audree* vv. 3563–78; Cotton fol. 57ra–b, AS 3:§85*
23. Quod quidam languens ad vitam rediit [That a gravely ill man came back to life] *Audree* vv. 3579–624; Cotton fols 57ra–57rb, AS 3:§86*
24. De ydropica curata [About a woman cured of dropsy] *Audree* vv. 3625–36; Cotton fol. 57va, AS 3:§87*
25. Quomodo nefandorum proditio per sanctam Etheldredam in stuporem omnium detegitur [How treason by evil-doers, to the amazement of all, was brought to light by St Audrey] *Audree* vv. 3637–734; Cotton fols 57va–60ra, AS 3:§§88–98, *LE* 3:§§47, 51–53⁵²
26. De muliere cecata et illuminata [About a woman blinded and restored to sight] *Audree* vv. 3735–52; Cotton fol. 60ra–b, AS 3:§99, *LE* 3:§57

⁵² Four chapters in *LE* correspond to one in *Miracula*, which Marie follows; one of the versions is a rearrangement of the other. The openings of AS 3:§88 and *LE* 3:§52 are alike, but AS 3:§§88–89 continue with the text of *LE* 3:§47, without the rubric, while AS 3:§§90–92 correspond to *LE* 3:§51. AS 3:§93, which reproduces the conclusion of *LE* 3:§51 in its first lines, then takes up the remainder of *LE* 3:§52, which concludes in AS 3:§97. AS 3:§98 corresponds to *LE* 3:§53.

27. De [quodam] qui [festum] sancte Edeldrede servare noluit [About a man who refused to observe the feast of St Audrey]⁵³ *Audree* vv. 3753–98; Cotton fols 60rb–60vb, AS 3:§§100–01, *LE* 3:§58
28. De puero infirmo et sanato [About a sick boy who was healed] *Audree* vv. 3799–816; Cotton fol. 60vb, AS 3:§102, *LE* 3:§59
29. De quodam fratre a morte ere[p]to [About a certain brother saved from death] *Audree* vv. 3817–78; Cotton fols 61ra–62ra, AS 3:§§103–07, *LE* 3:§61
30. De quodam puero monacho per sanctam Etheldredam sanato [About a certain boy monk healed by St Audrey] *Audree* vv. 3879–902; Cotton fol. 62ra–b, AS 3:§108, *LE* 3:§130
31. De demoniaco per sanctam Etheldredam liberato [About a man freed by St Audrey from possession by devils] *Audree* vv. 3903–32; Cotton fols 62rb–62va, AS 3:§§109–10, *LE* 3:§131
32. Quam severa ostensa est visio de hostibus ecclesie sancte Etheldrede [How dreadful to behold is the sight of enemies of St Audrey's church] *Audree* vv. 3933–70; Cotton fols 62va–63ra, AS 3:§§111–12, *LE* 3:§137
33. Quomodo Deus disperdidit hostes sancte sue virginis Etheldrede [How God brought to ruin the enemies of His holy virgin Audrey] *Audree* vv. 3971–98; Cotton fols 63ra–63vb, AS 3:§§113–15, *LE* 3:§138
34. De hom[i]ne erecto [About a man made to stand upright] *Audree* vv. 3999–4010; Cotton fols 63vb–64ra, AS 3:§116*
35. Quam benigne virgo Etheldreda, cuidam se diligenti, per visionem apparere dignata est [How graciously the virgin Audrey deigned to appear in a vision to someone who loved her] *Audree* vv. 4011–50; Cotton fols 64ra–65rb, AS 3:§§117–21, *LE* 3:§93
36. De agricolario sancte Etheldrede per visionem ostenso [About an overseer of St Audrey shown in a vision] *Audree* vv. 4051–72; Cotton fols 65ra–66va, AS 3:§122–23, *LE* 3:§94
37. De quodam ad fontem sancte Etheldrede sanato [About a man healed at St Audrey's fountain] *Audree* vv. 4073–122; Cotton fols 65rb–65va, AS 3:§124–28, *LE* 3:§116

⁵³ The rubric in Cotton and AS concerns a priest who refuses to observe the saint's feast. The rubricator confused this miracle with "De presbitero qui festa sanctorum nostrarum pronuntiare noluit" [About a priest who refused to proclaim the feasts of our saints], which is found only in *LE* (3:§121).

38. Quod mulier ceca ad fontem sancte Etheldrede illuminata est [That a blind woman was restored to sight at St Audrey's fountain] *Audree* vv. 4123–26; Cotton fol. 66va–b, AS 3:§§129–30, *LE* 3:§117
39. Quod virgo quedam, in fontem sancte Etheldrede lapsa, nihil mali passa est [That a young girl, after falling into St Audrey's fountain, suffered no harm] *Audree* vv. 4127–38; Cotton fols 66vb–67ra, AS 3:§131–32, *LE* 3:§118
40. Quomodo crux sancta loquelas edidit in protectione monachorum [How a holy cross spoke words to protect the monks] *Audree* vv. 4139–78; Cotton fols 67ra–67vb, AS 3:§133–35, *LE* 2:§51
41. Quomodo corpus beate Wi[h]tburge virginis allatum est in Ely [How the body of Blessed Wihtburga the virgin was brought to Ely] *Audree* vv. 4179–226; Cotton fols 67vb–69ra, AS 3:f.§135 (cf. 2:§17),⁵⁴ *LE* 2:§53
42. De hoste juste punito [About an enemy justly punished] *Audree* vv. 4227–56; Cotton fols 69ra–69va, AS 3:§§136–37*
43. Miraculum de cruce [The miracle of the cross] *Audree* vv. 4257–84; Cotton fol. 69va–b, AS 3:§138*
44. Quod per beatam Etheldredam multi sanantur a febre [That many are cured from fever by Blessed Audrey] *Audree* vv. 4285–340; Cotton fols 69vb–70ra, AS 3:§§139–40*
45. [Quod revelatione per paludem fit via ad sanctam Etheldredam] [That because of a revelation a causeway was built through the fens for St Audrey]⁵⁵ *Audree* vv. 4341–72; Cotton fols 70ra–70va, AS 3:§141, *LE* 3:§32
46. De paralytica curata [About a paralyzed woman who was cured] *Audree* vv. 4373–92; Cotton fols 70va–71ra, AS 3:§§142–44*
47. Quod elingui redditur loquela [That speech is restored to a mute] *Audree* vv. 4393–402; Cotton fols 71ra–71va, AS 3:§§145–46*
48. De ceca illuminata a sancta Etheldreda [About a blind girl restored to sight by St Audrey] *Audree* vv. 4403–10; Cotton fol. 71va–b, AS 3:§147*
49. Qualiter manus arida reformatur [How a withered hand is restored] *Audree* vv. 4411–14; Cotton fol. 71vb, AS 3:§148*

⁵⁴ AS does not reproduce material that occurs in the *Life* of St Wihtburga, March II, 606–08.

⁵⁵ The rubric in Cotton does not apply: “Quod quidam exanimis vite reformatur” [That a dead man is restored to life].

50. Quod inimicus ecclesie divina ultione punitur [That an enemy of the church is punished through divine vengeance] *Audree* vv. 4415–72; Cotton fols 71vb–72va, AS 3:149–52, *LE* 3:§115
51. De manu muliercule sanata [About a girl's hand that is healed] *Audree* vv. 4473–512; Cotton fols 72va–73ra, AS 3:§§153–55*
52. Quod quidam dolosus per sanctam Etheldredam est devictus [That a certain deceitful man was brought down by St Audrey] *Audree* vv. 4513–44; Cotton fols 73ra–73vb, AS 3:§§156–57*
53. Miraculum beate Etheldrede valde jucundum, quod in vita ejus contigisse legitur [A very delightful miracle of the Blessed Audrey that happened, as we read in her *Life*] *Audree* vv. 4545–610; Cotton fols 73vb–75ra, AS 3:§§158–61*⁵⁶
- 0c. Epilogue *Audree* vv. 4611–25

⁵⁶ Cotton continues (fol. 75ra) with the *Ely Cartulary*, which is separated from the *Miracula* by a large red initial with blue pen flourishes and is introduced by a rubric beginning “Proemium libri Etheldrede in Historia elyensis” [Prologue to Audrey's book on the history of Ely].

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE MANUSCRIPTS OF MARIE DE FRANCE

Keith Busby

If Marie de France is best known to modern scholarship as the author of the 12 *lais bretons* included, with prologue, in London, British Library, Harley 978, her celebrity—if such it can be considered—in the Middle Ages was of a different order. The well-known allusion to Marie as an author of *lais* in the *Vie de saint Edmund le rei* by Denis Piramus is of a specific time, place, and context, quite close to those of Marie:

E dame Marie autresi,
Ki en rime fist e basti
E compassa les vers de lais,
Ke ne sunt pas del tut verais;
E si en est ele mult loée
E la rime par tut amée,
Kar mult l'aiment, si l'unt mult cher
Cunte, barun e chivaler... (vv. 35–42)¹

[And likewise lady Marie, who put into rhyme, constructed, and arranged verses of *lais*, which are not true at all (not completely true?); and she is much praised for it and her rhymes appreciated everywhere, for many people like them, and counts, barons, and knights appreciate them.]

Once we leave the southern England of the latter part of the 12th century, however, Marie largely vanishes as an author of *lais* until she is rediscovered, through Harley 978, by the likes of De la Rue and Roquefort in the early days of romance philology. What I mean by this is that the prologue to *Guigemar* in Harley 978 and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 2168 (“Marit” in the latter),² and the allusion in the life of Edmund are the only forms of textual evidence attesting to the existence of an author by the name of Marie, and not even

¹ *La vie seint Edmund le rei, poème anglo-normand du XII^e siècle*, ed. Hilding Kjellman (Göteborg, 1935).

² *Guigemar*, vv. 3–4 and variants, in *Die Lais der Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke, 3rd ed. (Halle, 1925).

Marie de France at that, who composed *lais*. I take Harley 978 (England, possibly Oxford, c.1265) to be the earliest manuscript containing any of the *Lais* and believe that it may preserve the final arrangement, perhaps even authorial, of the 12 individual tales. The unusual form of the name ("Marit: oblit") in fr. 2168 (Picardy, s. 13^{2/2}) might indicate lack of familiarity in northeastern France in the later 13th century with the notion of Marie, the author. But unless Denis Piramus is exaggerating, we may conclude that a person by the name of Marie was known as an author of *lais* in knightly and aristocratic circles of her own time. If this is the case, then either time has been harsh on the early manuscript corpus or the *Lais* may have been initially transmitted orally for the large part, the transmission culminating in Harley 978, their *mise en remembrance*. Denis echoes Marie's own emphasis on the poetic form of the *lais* (not specified as *bretons*, however), in terminology that has finally received the close scrutiny it deserves.³ For good measure, I note that "de France" is only associated with an author who refers to herself as Marie in the epilogue to the *Fables*,⁴ the manuscript transmission of which I treat by and large separately from that of the *Lais* and the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz*. Even in the epilogue to the *Fables*, "de France"⁵ simply designates Marie's provenance on the Continent and is not to be taken in any sense as a family name, short of accepting the implausible theory that she was of the French royal house. The attribution to the same author ("Jo, Marie, ai mis en memoire / Le livre de l'Espurgatoire / En romanz" [vv. 2297–99]) of the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz* in BnF, fr. 25407 (England, s. 13^{4/4}) seems probable, while that of *La vie seinte Audree* in the Welbeck Abbey manuscript of saints' lives (London, BL, Add. 70513 [England, s. 13^{4/4}]) cannot reasonably be confirmed on linguistic grounds, *pace* Södergård et al.⁶

³ Cf. Ian Short, "Denis Piramus and the Truth of Marie's *Lais*," *Cultura Neolatina* 67 (2007), 319–40.

⁴ In this chapter, I use both *Fables* and *Ysopet* to designate the same collection of animal tales attributed to Marie.

⁵ Epilogue, vv. 1–4, in *Die Fabeln der Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke (Halle, 1898).

⁶ The *Espurgatoire* has been the object of three excellent editions, by T. Atkinson Jenkins (Philadelphia, 1894; Chicago, 1903), Karl Warnke (Halle, 1938), and most recently by Yolande de Pontfarcy (Louvain, 1995); *La vie seinte Audree, poème anglo-normand du XII^e siècle*, ed. Östen Södergård (Uppsala/Wiesbaden, 1955), pp. 38–39 and 55, whose conclusions that the language and versification of the *Audree* conform to continental usage of the end of the 12th century would at a stretch permit an

The manuscript history of the 12 *lais* post-Harley 978 and outside of the British Isles is one of recontextualization in which the assembled poems are disassembled and partially regrouped on thematic and generic grounds in a variety of situations and circumstances.⁷ I begin, however, with London, BL, Harley 978. In some ways, this codex has determined much scholarship on the *Lais*, which have nearly always been edited using it as a base manuscript. The lure of the neatly copied dozen poems with prologue, corresponding so well with our modern desire for structure and accessibility, has to some degree obscured the rich untidiness of the wider transmission, just as the single-manuscript editions of Chrétien de Troyes's romances from Paris, BnF, fr. 794 offer an incomplete, if authentically medieval, text.⁸ The deconstruction of Harley 978 into its various components, whether or not these are defined by gatherings or fascicles, is a classic example of the impoverishment of medieval literature in the interests of modern scholarly orderliness.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Harley 978 is its Englishness. A recent examination of it as a "whole book" by Andrew Taylor has revealed much about its history and inner workings that had long remained hidden.⁹ Taylor identifies with some plausibility an early owner, possibly its patron, as William of Winchester, monk of the Benedictine Abbey of Reading, who was probably in Reading from 1264 through 1276. The ownership of a manuscript containing Marie's *Lais*, along with the *Fables*, as well as religious-didactic, satirical, and historical material, by a monk of Reading is surely no more surprising than the identification, whether we accept it or not, with Marie herself as abbess of Shaftesbury. William of Winchester, while nothing of a philosopher, appears to have been something of a latter-day

attribution to our Marie (that Södergård does not make). Cf. also most recently, *The Life of Saint Audrey: A Text by Marie de France*, ed. and trans. June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban (Jefferson, NC, 2006), and McCash, "La vie seinte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?" *Speculum* 77 (2002), 744–77. Short ("Denis Piramus," p. 337) reminds us that even the attribution of the *Fables* and the *Espurgatoire* is not assured.

⁷ I have treated some of these issues in *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript*, 2 vols (Amsterdam, 2002), 1:465–80, a few paragraphs of which are reproduced here, with permission of Editions Rodopi. Further details on reading Marie's *lais* and *Ysopet* in sequence and context may also be found there.

⁸ Cf. Busby, *Codex and Context*, 1:93–108.

⁹ Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers* (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 76–136.

Abelard, if the accusations of his relationship with Agnes of Avenbury, Augustinian nun of Limebrook, nine miles to the northwest of Leominster, are anything to go by. William is found at Leominster Priory, a dependency of Reading, by 1276, and becomes sub-prior there in 1281. The bishop of Hereford and former Chancellor of the University of Oxford, Thomas de Cantilupe, lodged a formal complaint against William for scandalous misbehavior in 1282. The accused failed to appear in court, sent a proxy, was duly excommunicated by Thomas, and was eventually dismissed from office.

The circulation of secular literature in the monastery and copying of the texts in and around universities, illustrated perfectly by Harley 978, provides quite a different context from that usually taken for granted in literary histories or studies of the *Lais*, that is to say, the court. Denis Piramus certainly locates the audience of the *Lais* in aristocratic lay circles, but we should not forget that, even though we may not be able to identify Marie with a specific historical figure, she almost certainly lived and worked in a religious community of some kind. Her learning could hardly have been acquired elsewhere. So from the very beginning, the *Lais* must have circulated in worlds spiritual as well as secular. Harley 978 and its history put some flesh on the bones of these generalizations, bringing the *Lais* into the orbit of Reading Abbey, the university scribes of Catte Street, Oxford, and a priory in Herefordshire, all through the person of a renegade monk. Leominster, in the Welsh Marches, only a few miles from the border, is precisely in that area bounded by Herefordshire, Worcestershire, and Shropshire, which appears to have been a crucible for the composition and copying of French literature in the 13th and 14th centuries. Although it was not copied there, Harley 978 gravitated to the region which produced Harley 2253 and Digby 86, and which was no doubt also instrumental in the transmission of Celtic material into French through the cultural and political activities of the Cambro- and Hiberno-Normans.¹⁰ Like these other two manuscripts, Harley 978 is trilingual. It is better known in the English-speaking world, of course, as containing the iconic Middle English poem, "Sumer is i-cumen in." Its other contents include musical texts, a calendar, medical texts in Latin and Anglo-

¹⁰ Busby, *Codex and Context*, 2:510–12, and "Merlin, Barnagoys, l'Irlande, et les débuts du monde arthurien," in *Jeunesse et genèse du royaume arthurien: Les Suites romanesques du Merlin en prose*, ed. Nathalie Koble (Orléans, 2007), pp. 145–56.

Norman, satirical and ribald "Goliardic" verse in Latin, two laments for Thomas Becket and the so-called *Song of Lewes* in Latin, an Anglo-Norman treatise on hunting, and the *Lais* and *Fables* of Marie.

Whether Harley 978 was planned as a single book is a matter open to discussion, but its current state seems to have been already established when it was in the hands of William of Winchester. We may therefore legitimately look for thematic links between the different works in the manuscript, and some are clear, perhaps even self-evident: the *lai* and music, medicine and *Les deus amans*, hunting and *Guigemar*, the Goliardic verse and *Equitan*, and more besides, not to speak of the manifold links between the individual and collective short tales in the two collections by Marie. In a sense, it does not matter whether the arrangement of works within the book was done with a view to articulating these links, for they are there by mere virtue of the sequence. Other basic issues raised by the *Lais* in particular as they appear in Harley 978 relate to the text of the Prologue and to the order of the 12 poems. Both the Prologue and the arrangement are unique to this manuscript, begging the question of to what extent Marie herself was responsible for the order in which the *lais* appear there. Good arguments can be made for a purposeful juxtaposition and sequencing, the same kind of arguments that can be made when considering pairs and groups of apparently disparate texts in some of the larger *recueils*, such as Paris, BnF, fr. 837 and fr. 19152.¹¹ Although the *lais* are relatively speaking homogenous (with the possible exception of the fabliau-like *Equitan*), Marie, or whoever decided on the final arrangement, must surely have been aware of the possibilities of reading in sequence.

In point of fact, the manuscript tradition of the *Lais* is, relatively speaking, sparse in comparison to, say, the transmission of Chrétien de Troyes's romances and bears further witness to the notion that Marie, although not a figment of the modern imagination as Cerquiglini would have it,¹² has certainly been elevated by modern scholars to the canonical status she enjoys today. In addition to Harley 978, the *Lais* have been preserved in the following manuscripts:

¹¹ See, for example, Busby, *Codex and Context*, 1:437–63.

¹² Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante: histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris, 1989), pp. 48–54. On the Chrétien manuscripts, see Keith Busby, Terry Nixon, Alison Stones, and Lori J. Walters, *Les manuscrits de Chrétien de Troyes/The Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes*, 2 vols (Amsterdam, 1993).

London, BL, Cotton Vespasian B. XIV (s. 13^{ex}), England. *Lanval* only.

Paris, BnF, fr. 2168 (s. 13^{med}), Picardy. *Yonec* (ll. 396–end), *Guigemar*, *Lanval*.

Paris, BnF, nouv. acq. fr. 1104 (s. 13^{ex}), Île-de-France. *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, *Yonec*, *Chievrefoil*, *Les deus amans* (ll. 1–159), *Bisclavret* (ll. 233–end), *Milun*, *Fresne*, *Equitan*.

Paris, BnF, fr. 24432 (s. 14^{2/4}, after 1332), Île-de-France. *Yonec* only.

Despite containing only *Lanval*, the Cotton manuscript is in some respects comparable to Harley 978. The English context is again unmistakable: *Lanval*, unattributed, opens the book, followed by a prose *Brut* from the Saxons to Richard I, a Latin poem on the fall of Troy, Marie's *Fables* (incomplete and therefore unattributed), Henry of Croyland's Thomas Becket *Quadrilogus* followed by a letter to Henry from Elias of Evesham, a stanzaic life of Becket in Anglo-Norman, and a list of the archbishops of Canterbury and York to 1296. Just a decade or so after the manufacture of Harley 978, *Lanval* is divorced from other *lais*, but still in the company of Thomas Becket and in the context of British national and ecclesiastical history. It is possible that the presence in the same manuscript of a *lai* and Marie's *Fables* reflects a lingering recognition of Marie as author of both genres, clearer in Harley 978, but in the absence of the epilogue to the *Fables* this must remain speculation. What is clear, however, is the tenacious association of Marie's texts with the English church, further confirmation of the place, however modest, in monastic and ecclesiastical settings of Anglo-Norman secular narrative literature.

On the Continent, more or less contemporary with the Harley and Cotton manuscripts, the British context is absent entirely in the three Paris codices, where the *lais* are accompanied by other "courtly" texts, in conformity with the received view of the genre. That said, the latest of the three, fr. 24432, is a largely didactic collection of verse and prose, including works by Rutebeuf, Jean de Condé, the Clerc de Vau-doi, Huon de Méri, Jean de Saint-Quentin, Nicole de Margival, among others. It also contains the *Isopet II*, numerous anonymous moral *dits*, and a single fabliau, *Boivin de Provins*. Although this list of contents is incomplete, it gives some idea of the codicological context of *Yonec*: predominantly didactic and moral, but some texts redolent of the courtly tradition (Jean de Condé, Huon's *Tournoiement Antéchrist*, Nicole's *Panthère d'amours*), and many by recognized authors. It is arguable that the context brings out the biblical associations of *Yonec*, such as the evocation of the Holy Spirit in the form of a bird, whose

martyrdom calls to mind the death of the Savior. Clearly, the *lai* is here seen to be compatible with a wide range of vernacular secular narrative as well as some didactic prose, but it stands alone of its kind, as does *Boivin de Provins*, token witnesses of genres which are often regarded as forming a contrasting pair in the Old French genre-system.

BnF, fr. 2168 is probably best known as the unique manuscript of *Aucassin et Nicolette*, although it again contains a wide range of religious and secular narrative, including the Arthurian romance of *L'âtre périlleux*, Gautier de Metz's *L'image du monde*, several fabliaux, Raoul de Houdenc's *Le songe d'Enfer*, and the anonymous *lais* of *Narcisse* and *Graelent*,¹³ grouped with *Yonec*, *Guigemar*, and *Lanval*. Although once again lacking the epilogue and consequently unattributed, fr. 2168 also contains Marie's *Fables*. This manuscript is further evidence of the de-authorization, as it were, of Marie's *lais*, for even the occurrence of the name "Marit" is, as I have suggested, problematic. It may be significant that the *Fables* also seem to have undergone the same fate in this copy, although their very presence in the same collection as three *lais* attributed to Marie in Harley 978 may suggest a kind of tenacious, if increasingly tenuous, sense of maternity. Fr. 2168 shows the distribution of some *lais* in the Northeast, an area of considerable manuscript production at the time, in another sizeable collection which encompasses a wide variety of narrative and didactic genres. There can be little doubt, then, that by the middle of the 13th century, the *lai*, *breton* or otherwise, was established as a significant genre of Old French narrative on both sides of the Channel. In fact, the awareness of the *lai* as genre comes to define its manuscript transmission on the Continent, fr. 2168 pointing the way by virtue of grouping two anonymous *lais* with three of Marie's in one unit. At least one quire is missing before l. 396 of *Yonec*, a gathering which would almost certainly have contained something in the order of 1152 lines (calculation based on 2 columns of 37 lines), perhaps slightly fewer if the missing text(s) had pen-flourished initials at the beginning and if there were a few blank lines separating texts. Of the known *lais bretons*, *Desiré* or *Tyolet* would have fitted nicely, or, of course, a pair of shorter texts.

Discussion of the manuscript transmission of Marie's *Lais* must inevitably take into account that of the so-called anonymous *lais*, and

¹³ All of the anonymous Breton *lais* have been edited by Prudence Mary O'Hara Tobin, *Les lais anonymes des XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Geneva, 1976).

I have just shown how in fr. 2168, *Yonec*, *Guigemar*, and *Lanval* are associated in a group with *Narcisse* and *Graelent*. This clustering is significant in ways that go beyond the mere detachment of Marie's three *lais* from the person of their author, for the attraction of the *lai* as a genre appears so strong as to have brought into the orbit of the *lais bretons* strictly defined an Ovidian text, *Narcisse*, but designated as a *lai* in its *titulus*, "De Narciso li lais." This strongly suggests a broadening of the parameters of the *lai* in the middle of the 13th century to include classical tales of love, love rendered courtly by medieval retelling, and, in the case of Ovid at least, defined by the *merveilleux*, albeit not Breton.

The best illustration of generic consciousness at work as a determinant for the contents of a collection of *lais* is Paris, BnF, nouv. acq. fr. 1104 (s. 13^{ex}). Wanting only three folios, it is largely complete, in its original integral state, and contains the following poems in order: *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, *Désiré*, *Tyolet*, *Yonec*, *Guingamor*, *De l'espine*, *De l'espervier*, *Chievrefoil*, *Doon*, *Les deus amans*, *Bisclavret*, *Milon*, *Fresne*, *Du lecheor*, *Equitan*, *Tydorel*, *Du cort mantel*, Jean Renart's *Lai de l'ombre*, *Du conseil*, *D'amours*, *D'Aristote*, *Graelent*, *De l'oiselet*. There can be no doubt as to the intention of the planner of this manuscript, for it contains an *incipit* on fol. 1ra ("Ci commencent les lays de Bretaigne. Cist est de Guimar") and an *explicit* on fol. 79ra ("Explicit les lays de Breteigne"). While the majority of these *lais* are certainly *lais bretons*, some are clearly not, and the planner has brought into the orbit of the Breton variety other texts widely known in the 13th century as *lais*, a tendency just noted in connection with fr. 2168. Examination of the *incipit-tituli* in the manuscripts of texts such as *Le lai de l'ombre* or *Le lai d'Aristote* or *Le lai de l'oiselet* shows quite clearly that this is the case. Historically, it may also be that the conception of the *lai breton* as it was probably understood at the end of the 12th century (and essentially that which modern medievalists have tried to recover) no longer obtained by the end of the 13th, when nouv. acq. fr. 1104 was produced. The badly rubbed miniature on fol. 1ra of the manuscript shows a seated audience on the left, a *jongleur* with instrument in the centre, and a seated king to the right. This would tend to present the texts in nouv. acq. fr. 1104 as performance texts, although it is impossible to say whether the miniature is supposed to represent an original Breton composer and performer of *lais* or a contemporary *jongleur* performing the poems as they are preserved in the manuscript.

If the redefinition of the *lai* is at its clearest in nouv. acq. fr. 1104, nine of its 24 poems are still among those attributed to Marie in Harley 978. Cologny-Geneva, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Bodmer 82 (England, s. 13^{ex}) appears to be defined as a manuscript of *lais*, but paradoxically for a book copied in England, it preserves nothing by Marie, containing (in its original order) Raoul de Houdenc's *Le roman des eles*, *Le donnei des amans*, *Le lai d'Haveloc*, *Le lai de Desiré*, and *Le lai de Nabaret*. At first sight, only the last three texts would appear to qualify as *lais*, but the *Roman des eles* is referred to on two separate occasions elsewhere as a *lai*, despite its predominantly didactic nature, and the *Donnei* is redolent of the language and formulae of the *lai breton* to which it constitutes a perfect companion text.¹⁴ The reach of the *lai* is wide indeed, as the genre comes to redefine not only itself but also those texts which it attracts within its orbit.¹⁵ As the instigator and prime mover of the *lai* as a written poetic genre of short tale, Marie's influence appears to extend in surprising ways far beyond the confines of her own *œuvre* and its manuscript transmission. The most extreme example of this development can be seen in a section of Paris, BnF, fr. 1553 (Picardy, 1284–85), where fols 480v–504r contain, in order, *Le lai de l'espine*, *Li flours d'amours*, *Le lai d'Ignauré*, the fabliau of *Constant du Hamel*, *Le lai de l'ombre* by Jean Renart, *Courtois d'Arras* ("Li lais de courtois," fol. 498rb), and the fabliau of *Auberee, la vieille maquerelle* ("Li lais de dame Aubree," fol. 501va; but cf. "Ichi nostre fabliaus define / Chi define de dame Aubree," fol. 504ra). *Courtois d'Arras* and *Auberee, la vieille maquerelle* could hardly conform to even the most generous definition of a *lai*, the *explicit* of the latter suggesting serious terminological flexibility.

The transmission of Marie's *Fables*, or *Ysopet*, presents a distinct contrast with that of the *Lais*. I have already pointed out in passing the occasional association of the two in a few manuscripts, but the fundamental contrast is twofold, namely, in sheer numbers and in a more persistent tradition of authorial attribution. Twenty-five manuscripts, insular and continental, of the *Ysopet* have survived, ranging in date from the beginning of the 13th century (York, Minster Library, XVI K 12)

¹⁴ Busby, *Codex and Context*, 1:467–70.

¹⁵ The question is also relevant to discussion of the perplexing list of titles, mostly of *lais*, on fol. 200r of Shrewsbury School, MS 7 (England, c.1270).

through the beginning of the 16th (Paris, BnF, fr. 4939); seven copies of medieval manuscripts also exist made in the 18th and 19th centuries. The epilogue in which Marie names herself, or the precise lines from the epilogue, are lacking in nine of the 25, including the York copy, but the attribution is secure, particularly given the authority of Harley 978. The long history of fable collections in general and the universal presence of Æsop and Phædrus as originators of the genre may have rendered Marie's authorship redundant in the eyes of some scribes and manuscript planners while reinforcing it for others. The prologue and epilogue of the *Ysopet* have been studied in some detail, particularly with respect to the identity of the dedicatee, "cunte Wilame," of the supposed author of Marie's source, "li reis Alfrez," and of Marie herself. However, it was only in 1989 that Françoise Vielliard re-examined the variants of these lines in the manuscript tradition as a whole.¹⁶ Her painstaking analysis is an object-lesson in what can be learned from the study of textual cruces such as these and how dangerous the unthinking acceptance of received scholarly ideas can be. While Vielliard's discussion does not prove or disprove any of the identifications of "Willame" or "Alfrez," the variants to the latter ("Alvrez," "Alrei," "Auvrez," "Avree," "Avrez," "Uvres," "Almes," "Mires," "Henris," "Uns clers anglois") may suggest that our ready acceptance of the canonical reading has been too eager.

The tenacity of Marie's authority with respect to the *Ysopet* stands in stark contrast to the de-authorization of the *lais*. The anonymity of the *lais* originally composed by the Bretons, which Marie claims as her sources, envelops them once again in the course of the 13th century, as the poems come to be absorbed into the general corpus of unattributed vernacular narrative. Marie's authorial identity with respect to the *Ysopet* is in point of fact defined by the relationship between the Latin and the vernacular fable. It is, moreover, visible iconographically as well as textually in the four manuscripts of the *Ysopet* which have author-portraits of some kind: Paris, BnF, fr. 2173 (s. 13^{3/4}); Ars. 3142 (ca. 1285); BnF, fr. 1446 (s. 13^{ex}); and Vatican City, BAV, Ottob. Lat. 3064 (s. 14^{ex}).¹⁷ These illustrations can be seen as exemplifying

¹⁶ Françoise Vielliard, "Sur la tradition manuscrite des *Fables* de Marie de France," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 147 (1989), 371–97.

¹⁷ Kurt Ringger, "Prolégomènes à l'iconographie des œuvres de Marie de France," in *Orbis Medievalis (Mélanges Bezzola)*, ed. Georges Günter, Marc-René Jung, and Kurt Ringger (Bern, 1978), pp. 329–42; Sandra Hindman, "Æsop's Cock and Marie's

how authorial identity can be constructed and maintained through awareness on the part of manuscript planners of the *translatio* tradition. In fr. 2173, the text of the *Ysopet* is framed by two portraits, the first, a historiated initial (“Cil qui sevent de letreüre”) showing a male figure seated writing (fol. 58ra), and the second, a marginal miniature (fol. 93rb) showing a female figure writing at her desk. I take these to represent Æsop and Marie de France respectively and consequently to articulate the *mise en roman* of the learned Latin tradition, which Sandra Hindman considers a “feminine *translatio studii* already implicit in the text.”¹⁸ Whether or not the second image shows Marie having “the last word,” as Hindman claims, is moot, although the view that it depicts her as a “full-fledged [*sic*] author rather than as a mere translator” is certainly not consonant with medieval views of authorship.¹⁹ Indeed, one might even argue that the location of the image of Marie quite literally marginalizes her role without effacing it altogether. The historiated initial of Æsop, in contrast, underlines his inseparability from the actual text and its composition. In Ars. 3142, the opening miniature of the *Ysopet* on fol. 256ra substitutes Marie for Æsop, thus integrating her more fully into the ranks of “Cil qui sevent de letreüre,” and showing her writing, engaged in the actual process of *translatio*, but still by definition not composing the *materia* of the fables. The final historiated initial of the text on fol. 273ra (“El finement de cest escrit”) again shows Marie, this time holding, and appearing to cast a critical eye over, her finished book; an open trunk on the right displays other books, perhaps the sources she has used to produce her own *Ysopet*. In this disposition, the *mise en roman* is privileged over the Latin *auctores* even at what is the initial stage of the inevitable vernacularization of classical culture. The trunk of sources can now be closed as long as the romance book remains open;

Hen: Gendered Authorship in Text and Image in Manuscripts of Marie de France's *Fables*,” in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor (London/Toronto, 1996), pp. 45–56; and Susan L. Ward, “Fables for the Court: Illustrations of Marie's *Fables* in Paris, BNF, MS Arsenal 3142,” in *Women and the Book*, ed. Smith and Taylor, pp. 190–203. Cologne, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, MS Bodmer 113 is a 15th-century copy of fr. 2173; it has a crude reproduction of the author portrait on fol. 28ra. The author portraits are reproduced in Busby, *Codex and Context*, 1:471–77; Hindman, “Æsop's Cock”; and Ward, “Fables for the Court.”

¹⁸ Hindman, “Æsop's Cock,” p. 48.

¹⁹ Loc. cit. The illustrations in fr. 2173 are definitely Italian, but the hand is just as surely French. It is therefore not at all certain that the manuscript was actually made in Italy. See Viellard, “Sur la tradition manuscrite,” p. 383.

the preservation of the sources, however, leaves open the possibility of future *translatio*. Between the two illustrations, the ink, pen, and blank parchment of the first have been transformed into the written and completed book visible in the second, the reading process thereby having been synchronized with the writing of the text.²⁰ The historiated initial (“Haute honor et bone aventure”) on fol. 88vb of fr. 1446 shows Marie seated in the traditional pose of a teacher, while that on fol. 235ra of Ottob. Lat. 3064 shows her leaning on a desk before four persons, one of whom is kneeling; beside her, a table is loaded with books. By presenting Marie, as Ringger has argued, as a *poeta doctus*, these last two miniatures render explicit what is largely implicit in the others, further stressing her place in a long and learned tradition.²¹

The conjuncture of *Le couronnement Renart* and Marie’s *Ysopet* in BnF, fr. 1446 (1295) is clearly justified by a shared animal *matière*, but the nature of the link between the epilogue of the former and the prologue of the latter deserves comment. The anonymous *Couronnement Renart* is dedicated to the memory of Guillaume de Dampierre († 1251), husband of Marguerite de Flandre, and its author appeals to the precedent of Marie:

Et pour çou dou conte Guillaume,
Qui ceste honor eut encharcie,
Pris mon prologue com Marie,
Qui pour lui traita d’Isopet. (vv. 3360–63, fol. 88va)²²

[And for this reason I dedicated my prologue to Count William, who accepted this honor, just like Marie, who composed an *Isopet* (fable collection) for him.]

The transition between the two works is effected thus:

Et pour çou veil ici endroit
Raconter pour coi m’entremet
Des proverbes d’Isopet.

[And because of this, I want here to relate why I am undertaking the sayings of the *Isopet*.]

²⁰ Cf. also Ward, “Fables for the Court,” pp. 195–96.

²¹ Ringger, “Prolégomènes,” pp. 340–41.

²² *Le couronnement de Renard, poème du treizième siècle*, ed. Alfred Foulet (Princeton, 1929).

Ici apriés porrés oïr les provierbes Yzopet (in red)

[Hereinafter you may hear the sayings of the Yzopet]

Haute honor et bone aventure
 Puist cil avoir, por cui ma cure
 Ai mis et met de raconter
 Chose par coi en pris monter
 On porroit, a bon entendre.
 Or entendés pour Dieu, singneur,
 Coment Marie nos traïta
 Des provierbes, qu'ele trova
 D'Izopet, dont desus a dit.
 Si entendés com ele dit! (ll. 3399–408, fol. 88vb)

[May he receive high honor and good adventure, the one for whom I have put, and continue to put, my careful attention into recounting something by which he may increase in worth if he listens closely. Now listen for the sake of God, lords, to how Marie brought us the sayings of the Izopet, on which she elaborated. Hear now what she says!]

This sleight-of-hand initially suggests that the author of *Le couronnement Renart* is himself going to compose an *Ysopet* ("Isopet: m'entremet") but then restates the authority and authorship of Marie in the passage interpolated before Marie's own prologue ("Cil qui se vent de letrëure") and accompanied by the author portrait discussed above. The author of *Le couronnement Renart* has appropriated Marie's text at the same time he has appropriated her dedicatee, "le cunte Willame" by identifying him, impossibly of course, with Guillaume de Dampierre. And if the narrative voice here might be considered to be that of the scribe-compiler rather than that of the author of *Le couronnement Renart*, as Sylvia Huot has argued, then the former has effected a threefold appropriation—the author of *Le couronnement Renart*, Marie, and her patron.²³

Marie's accepted authorship of the *Ysopet* has odd gravitational effects in other manuscripts, both during and after production. As I have shown, London, BL, Cotton Vespasian B. XIV, for example, opens with *Lanval*, unattributed (fols 1r–8v), and, after a short chronicle of British history and a Latin Troy poem, preserves the integral text (minus the epilogue, however) of Marie's fable collection (fols

²³ Sylvia Huot, *From Song to Book: The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry* (Ithaca, 1987), pp. 32–35.

19ra–32rb) as well as a French stanzaic life of Becket and other material related to Canterbury. Although this manuscript has been mutilated somewhat, all of its parts visibly share the same origin, and its composition seems to have been dependent on at least three underlying notions: *translatio studii*; Becket and Canterbury; and the relationship, articulated by the absent Marie, between *lais* and fables. Cambridge, UL, Ee. 6. II, a composite manuscript of the 14th century, contains anonymous versions of the life of St Margaret and St Patrick's Purgatory (fols 1–37; s. 13^{2/2}) and Marie's *Ysopet* (fols 39–83; s. 13^{1/2}). What may have happened here, I suggest, is that an association of Marie with Æsopic material and with the legend of Patrick's Purgatory led to the post-production assembly of the two texts, even though the particular version of the story of Owein is not hers and the epilogue of the *Ysopet* wanting.

The story of St Patrick's Purgatory was widespread in the Middle Ages, and six Old French vernacular verse versions of Henry of Sal-trey's *Tractatus De Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* exist, one of which is attributed to Marie in the epilogue of its unique manuscript witness, Paris, BnF, fr. 25407 (England, s. 13^{ex}-s. 14^{inc.}); there are two French prose redactions. Codicological analysis shows fr. 25407 to be composed of three originally separate sections, that containing the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz* also preserving, in order, Huon de Méri's *Tournoiement Antéchrist* (followed by the *Espurgatoire*), a prose translation of the *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, and *Le roman des romans*. Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the entire manuscript, or even of the relationships between the four texts contained in this particular section. However, Huon's poem shares with the *Espurgatoire* an interest in the otherworldly and exploits the popularity of the courtly-chivalric mode for the articulation of more spiritual concerns. These two works are by their very nature compatible, and although the *Moralium dogma philosophorum* and the *Roman* are more severe, their severity is aimed in part at some of the same secular issues central to the *Tournoiement* and the *Espurgatoire*. The *Moralium* and the *Roman* furthermore hold out celestial promise after the infernal menace of the *Tournoiement* and the *Espurgatoire* and the glimpse of Paradise offered in the latter.

Study of the manuscript transmission of the works traditionally accepted to an author commonly known as "Marie de France" is a salutary reminder that the texts preserved by medieval books require a different approach to those contained in printed ones. The canon-

ization of Marie's texts, the orderly circumscription of her perceived *œuvre* into neatly structured works of unchallenged attribution, not to mention the codicological decontextualization effected by the modern critical edition, are all questioned, if not entirely belied, by a varied and untidy corpus of manuscripts. While it is neither practical nor desirable to dispense with the scholarly editions which have served us so well since the rise of romance philology in the second half of the 19th century, an awareness of the medieval material support of the *Lais*, the *Fables*, and the *Espurgatoire Saint Patrice* can enhance our understanding and appreciation of their many qualities.

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